NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY IN A SECULAR WORLD

A Constructivist Work in Philosophical Epistemology and Christian Apologetics

PETER LAMPE



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For Margaret, my beloved wife

Possessing only the five senses, we note only those properties of an apple that we can perceive, while other properties... perhaps exist.

(Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes 1.97)*

No human has power over the wind to restrain the wind... Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really find it out... As you do not know the path of the wind..., so you do not know the work of God.

(Ecclesiastes 8:8, 17; 11:5)

Contents

Abbreviations

RAC *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, I–XX* (ed. Th. Klauser et al.; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–2004).
TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie I–XXXVI* (ed. G. Krause and G. Müller; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–2004).

Chapter I

Introduction: Indicating the Problem

As one of the most influential books of Western culture, the New Testament constitutes the foundation document for a Christian understanding of reality. Almost seventy generations of human beings have been formed by it; from it they develop answers to how they should think about the world and humanity, about God, life, and finally death.

The Christian understanding of reality, made normative through the New Testament and the tradition generated by it, presents a particular way of regarding the world. But what is an understanding of reality? What is reality?

Today this seemingly banal question is being discussed over a broad academic spectrum: by philosophical epistemologists as well as by brain researchers in the natural sciences, by psychologists and computer scientists as well as neurologists. It appears to be inseparable from other basic enigmas: What is consciousness? What is the 'I'? What role does the brain play in constituting our reality?

The theological guild has only hesitantly participated in the contemporary interdisciplinary interchange about brain research, in which the concept of reality plays a prominent role. This is amazing since epistemology has always belonged to the prolegomena homework of theology. In systematic theology, for example, Wilfried Härle's and Eilert Herms's book on *Das Wirklichkeitsverständnis des christlichen Glaubens* has fuelled a number of articles, especially in the *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie*.[1] But a discussion on a larger scale has not been undertaken.

[1] W. Härle and E. Herms, *Rechtfertigung: Das Wirklichkeitsverständnis des christlichen Glaubens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1979); further among others E. Herms, 'Gottes Wirklichkeit', *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie* 1 (1987): 82–101. I attempted to reflect theologically on the specifically constructivist concept of reality in a lecture at a convention in Strasbourg in 1996 (P. Lampe, 'Wissenssoziologische Annäherung an das Neue Testament', *NTS* 43 [1997]: 347–66, with subsequent studies [see bibliography s.v. Lampe]). A. Klein followed in 2003 with a systematic-theological study, *'Die Wahrheit ist irgendwo da drinnen…?:' Zur theologischen Relevanz (radikal-)konstruktivistischer Ansätze unter besonderer Berücksichtigung neurobiologischer Fragestellungen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003). See also H. Erdmann, *Vom Glauben an die Wahrheit und von der Wahrheit des Glaubens: Konstruktivismus und seine Bedeutung für Wissenschaft, Weltbild, Ethik und Religion* (Frankfurt/Main: Haag & Herchen, 1999); R. F. Weidhas, *Konstruktion – Wirklichkeit – Schöpfung: Das Wirklichkeitsverständnis des christlichen Glaubens im Dialog mit dem Radikalen Konstruktivismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kognitionstheorie H. Maturanas*, EHS.T 23/506 (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1994).

Two examples illustrate how important it is for theology to participate in this debate on the concept of reality. In the past, New Testament scholars, in an almost embarrassing way, have quarrelled in the mass media over whether the personal existence of the human Jesus irrevocably came to an end with his death and his body decayed; that is, whether the Easter experiences were 'subjective', manufactured visions to be explained on a psychological level, or whether in what is called the 'resurrection of Jesus' none other than God acted creatively; that is, whether the human Jesus who had died was granted a new personal existence from his death, so that he could manifest himself in the Easter apparitions as an acting subject, to whom humans can relate as another person, whom they can address as contemporary (prayer), and who interacts with them. Against the background of the interdisciplinary discussion about reality, this debate is embarrassing not because these two possible choices in the ancient dispute about the resurrection were marketed, but rather because representatives of the first alternative assumed that the dispute can be decided on the level of *historical labours*: allegedly the decision whether one or the other position is more attractive depends on the intensity of the historical-critical exploration of all available source materials, i.e. on an intensification or neglect of historical inquiry.[2] As will be shown, the decision between one position or the other does not depend on this, but on the understanding of history and reality that exegetes, historians, and theologians hold *antecedent to* any historical labours. The discussion about which thesis concerning the resurrection is the 'better' can be carried out only on the meta-level of the concept of reality. That is where criteria for 'better' and 'worse' can be worked out. In short, what is embarrassing about the dispute stems from the fact that at times not only the discussion in systematic theology is unknown, but the present interdisciplinary discussion about the concept of reality is also ignored. Perhaps from time to time an astonished reader of the newspapers, who has followed the dispute over the resurrection, would feel transported back to the eighteenth century.

A second example provokes the question as to what we as exegetes mean by 'reality'. The communication between Paul and Corinth presented an arena in which two opposing early Christian designs of reality collided with each other: Corinthian pneumatic enthusiasm and Paul's theology of the cross; the Corinthian self-understanding of being raised with Christ already in the present and the Pauline self-understanding of existence as an identification process with Christ in his crucifixion. What is at stake in both schemas is the entirety of the Christian interpretation of existence. What is at stake is nothing less than the question of what is to be regarded as the all-embracing reality for early Christian communities: a resurrection existence of believers

[2] G. Lüdemann, *Die Auferstehung Jesu: Historie, Erfahrung, Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 11ff.

encountered in uplifting spiritual experiences like glossolalia, or an existence characterized by the cross?

Exegetes have grown accustomed to describing the Corinthian rhetoric of an already present resurrection existence as 'illusionary', whereas Paul with his theology of the cross takes the 'realities' of the world, suffering and groaning, in all their gravity more seriously than the Corinthians. Paul is allegedly 'in touch with reality', whereas the Corinthians fool themselves with an enthusiastic 'fantasy'.

But which concept of reality do we promulgate when we make statements like these? And what could it mean with reference to this concept of reality that someone harbours an 'illusion' or creates a 'fantasy'? Here there is a need for clarification inside the camp of exegesis. Could it be that the concept of reality on which these statements are based is due to naive realism, which in the history of thought has been surpassed? According to naive realism, 'reality' exists independently from us in the world outside; human thought and language mirror it – at least in an approximate way.[3] Or have we given no thought to our concept of reality? This is the impression that readers get when they leaf through theological-exegetical literature and read phrases that speak willy-nilly of 'reference to reality', of 'the reality of the resurrection', of 'being in touch with reality', of 'eschatological reality', and similar formulations. On which concept of reality are such expressions based?

Of course, at least in hermeneutical contexts also more reflective statements are discernible, for example when in contexts of language theory in the New Testament camp in connection with John L. Austin[4] interpreters speak not only of 'language that reflects reality' but also of performative language that 'creates reality'. That in such a way of thinking the concept of reality is also at stake needs to be pondered more intensely.

Something else is at stake when we compare the Corinthians' and Paul's theological schemas of reality and consider our own concept of reality: What role does human *experience* play in forming theological understandings of reality? We exegetes say that Paul was more 'in touch with reality' because he took seriously the painful experiences of Christian existence in the here and now – experiences which he summarized in his peristaseis catalogues[5] and which for him indicated the presence of the cross of Christ in his own existence.[6] By contrast, the Corinthians with their resurrection enthusiasm allegedly had fancifully jumped over these negative experiences in the world

[3] The latter is how critical realism qualifies naive realism, which thinks it can reflect reality at a ratio of 1:1.

[4] J. L. Austin, *Zur Theorie der Sprechakte* (*How to Do Things with Words*), Reclam Universalbibliothek 9396 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979); J. L. Austin, 'Performative Äusserungen', in *Gesammelte philosophische Aufsätze* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), 305–27; et al.

[5] 1 Cor. 4.9-13; 2 Cor. 4.7-12; 6.4-10; 11.23-29; 12.10; and throughout.

[6] For example 2 Cor 4.10: '. . . always carrying in the body the death of Jesus'.

and had not taken them into account. Was their 'error' that their thinking gave too little consideration to human experience? It is not that simple. Their shortcoming was not less consideration of experience, but a different *selection* of experiences compared to Paul. The Corinthian enthusiasts grounded themselves on experiences: on uplifting charismatic events, above all on glossolalia, on adventures of high-altitude spiritual flights. Experiences of *this* type were considered important enough to be integrated into their own theological view of reality and to be perceived as signs of their resurrection existence here and now.

What role does human situational experience play in forming theological designs of reality? This question is directly connected with the other question about our concept of reality.

Chapter II

Stages in the History of Thought on the Way to Constructivism

Before analysing the process of how theological designs of reality are formed, a rapid and selective[1] expedition through the history of thought is in order. What is the situation with respect to the concept of reality in the camps of philosophy of science and sociology of knowledge?

1 Between Naive Realism and Ontological Idealism

Epistemology is as old as the recognition that appearances and what is presumed to be reality are poles apart. When external appearances prove deceptive, the epistemological question arises whether and how the truth about the world as it allegedly 'really is' can be attained.

1.1 Epistemological idealism

The situation today after the collapse[2] of logical empiricism in the 1970s is partially characterized by pessimism similar to that which the Platonic view had already displayed. Confronted with the difficulty of distinguishing reliable observations from illusions, Plato turned his back on the quagmire of the world of experience, dismissed everything in it as mere appearance,[3] and asserted that reality is to be found not in the physical world of *sensibilia* but in the non-physical world of *intelligibilia*, that is, in a world that contains

[1] This chapter will not touch, for example, on (1) the *psychology of personal constructs*, G. A. Kelly, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, 3 vols (New York: Norton, 1955), nor on the scholars whom he engages; (2) the *cybernetic* and *general systems theory* presuppositions of constructivism, which go back to Norbert Wiener and Ludwig von Bertalanffy; or (3) the diverse *theories of organization of the self*, as, e.g., synergetic and chaos theories (see, e.g., R. Paslack, *Urgeschichte der Selbstorganisation: Zur Archäologie eines wissenschaftlichen Paradigmas* [Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1991]).

[2] On this brutal choice of words see, e.g., Patricia S. Churchland: 'Logical empiricism, though still admired for its clarity and rigor, is now generally assumed to have collapsed' (*Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988]). On logical empiricism, see 'The collapse of logical empiricism' below (pp. 13–15).

[3] Already earlier than him Parmenides (540–480 BCE), in his didactic poem 'On Nature', presented the physical world as a world of potentially illusive appearances, of *doxa*.

mathematical entities and other non-physical objects of thought. This meant rejection of the world of experience and contemplation of the non-physical world of thought. Mathematics became the model of knowledge and of the acquisition of knowledge, whereas interaction with the physical world had the capacity to lead only to opining and sheer belief,[4] never to *knowledge*[5] about reality.

The rational soul, itself a non-physical substance, which also is capable of existing independently from the physical body, functioned for Plato as the organ of the contemplation of the non-physical world. Plato's concept was thus accompanied by a dualism of substance, which distinguished between a spiritual substance and a material substance. The latter participates less in being than the former.

We can designate Plato's position *epistemological idealism*: assured knowledge is possible, but it is supplied only by the mind, by reason itself, not by the experience of things of the exterior world.

1.2 Epistemological realism

Plato's schema has been, it seems, undermined by the success of the empirical sciences, which were inspired by Aristotle – in a grand style since the time of the Renaissance. Already in his time, Thomas Aquinus had coined the phrase *ens intellectui concordet . . . adaequatio intellectus et rei*:[6] the being of the world external to us and our rational cognition are in conformity; thing and intellect correspond to each other. This *epistemological realism*, which focuses on *correspondence* (*adaequatio, concordia*), holds 'objective', more or less assured knowledge to be possible on the basis of experience of things in the exterior world. According to this epistemological optimism, thanks to experience, the world that exists apart from the human mind can be known as it is, at least partially.

However, the empiricist assumption of correspondence does not resolve all the problems. How do sense data, for example a green spot in my field of vision, relate to the external world, let's say an apple in front of me on the table? The things we experience directly are not the objects of the external world but impressions on the senses such as light, sound, pain,

4 πίστις (reckoning empirical objects to be true) and εἰκασία (cognition of their shadows and images) are δόξα (mere opining, not knowing).

5 ἐπιστήμη/γνῶσις (knowledge/cognition) comes about through νόησις (mental contemplation of the ideas) and διάνοια (thinking that operates with concepts). Cf. classically, e.g., Plato's allegory of the cave in *Politeia* (514aff.). Immediately before, at the end of the sixth book, he presents the allegory of the sun and the simile of the line.

6 '*Prima ergo comparatio entis ad intellectum est ut ens intellectui concordet*: . . . that being is in accordance with the intellect . . . Thing and cognitive faculty are in conformity.' See Thomas, *Questiones disputatae de veritate* 1, art. 1–2. Thomas's 'teacher' Aristotle likewise spoke about the alignment of the faculty of perception with what is perceptible (e.g. *On the Soul* 418a.5–6).

taste, and odours, which result from the interaction of the senses with the world. How can we determine the relationship between these sense data and the external world?

For realism, the category of similarity has been important. Because the internal representations of the external world mediated through the sense data are – as images – allegedly similar to that world, human beings can know, at least in an approximate way, something about the make-up of this external reality. They reflect this reality in their minds; they reproduce it. Things are more or less the way humans perceive them.

For the realist, the object in its own being, which is independent from the human brain, dominates the cognitive process. The subject of cognition, the human mind, conforms to the object and submits to it – like a *tabula rasa* to a stylus or a drop of wax to a signet ring.[7]

1.3 Problems of representation theories, ontological idealism

This sort of realism ran into resistance. The protest was articulated in the first half of the eighteenth century most radically by George Berkeley (1685–1753), the Bishop of Cloyne.[8] If sense data are the only access to an external reality, then to speak of similarity is nothing other than pure speculation. If cognitive access to this reality is never direct but always only mediated, how is it possible to speak of the composition of this reality?

This problem of all representation theories is insurmountable. (A) For Kant, it was inconceivable 'how the anschauung of something present could enable me to know how it is in itself, since *its attributes cannot pass over into my imagination*'.[9] Attributes of the external physical world – of an electromagnetic wave, for example – do not simply transfer over to the altogether different perception apparatus in the brain. We will have to illustrate this in more detail below (III) with a look at neurophysiology. For example, the brain reacts to certain external electromagnetic wave lengths by perceiving colour, although in the external world described by physics colours do not exist. Is it possible in such a case to speak of 'reflection',

[7] Early philosophers already used these sorts of images (e.g. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 424a.17ff.; Plato, *Theaetetus* 191d).

[8] G. Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 vols (ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop; London: Nelson, 1948–57).

[9] I. Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (ed. K. Vorländer; Hamburg: Meiner, 1957), § 9 (my emphasis). Cf. also Leibniz, as he denounced Descartes' interactionism in the clock allegory: 'Conventional philosophy propagates the idea of physical inflow. However, since it is *inconceivable how material particles . . . from one of the two substances* [i.e. material body and soul] *could pass over to the other*, one is compelled to give up this view' (G. W. Leibniz, *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie*, vol. 2 [ed. E. Cassirer; Hamburg: Meiner; 3rd edn; 1966], 272ff. [my emphasis]).

or 'representation', or 'similarity'? A colour does not 'resemble' an electromagnetic wave frequency. Our brain creates an image sui generis, not a likeness. In art we would say that the brain paints 'in the abstract' or 'expressionistically', not 'realistically'. (B) It could be possible to take into account the complete otherness of object and subject of cognition and, at the same time, to hold on to the correspondence of the knowledge of the subject with its object: We could replace the category of archetype/image with cause/effect in order to describe the object–subject relation. According to this concept, in order to gain cognitive access to reality, the subject has to *infer back* from the effect to the cause. Truth would then hang on the accuracy of the inference. However, in this way we also end in a dilemma. Every inference from an effect to one particular cause remains problematic, because other causes would also be quite possible. Who guarantees that the inference from the perception of green in my brain to the apple is correct? Speaking honestly, I cannot say, 'I see an apple,' but only, 'What I see is *possibly* caused by an apple.' The external world that I presume is merely one possible world. I *believe* that the ontic world is the way I imagine it, but I do not know it. The correspondence, which I assert, remains a matter of faith, a hypothesis, with which life and survival are safeguarded. It is often worthwhile to reach out one's hand to a green spot and bite into it. But this sort of pragmatism does not take the place of epistemological certainty.[10]

For George Berkeley, it was more plausible to assume that our concepts of objects of an external reality are nothing more than constructs of the mind: the product of a gigantic grasping of sense data by the human mind, which organizes these data and assembles them into a system in our head. According to Berkeley, the so-called external reality is nothing other than an organized assembly of sense data in our head. A world independent from the brain does not exist; at least we can know nothing of it, not even that an external world evokes the sense data that we process.[11] This position can be designated *ontological idealism*: The world is a construct of the mind and accordingly the only reality is the mental one in our head (*esse est percipi* 'to be is to be perceived').

[10] On other problems of the archetype/image and of cause/effect theories, see K. Gloy, *Wahrheitstheorien* (Tübingen/Basel: Franke, 2004), 92–130; pp. 105–126 also a critique on the particular 'representation theory' of Wittgenstein (L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 1 [Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984]). On the unsuitability of pragmatic criteria of truth, see chapter II, section 2.3 and chapter VIII below.

[11] For Berkeley, sensory perceptions, that is, 'ideas' that are passively received, are not of worldly, material origin, but divine origin. 'There is . . . some other will or spirit that produces them' (*Principles of Human Knowledge* § 29). This concept was not new; see n. 21 below.

1.4 Linking ontological realism and epistemological idealism (Kant)

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) did not go so far. He is appropriately designated an *ontological realist*: a world independent from the brain exists apart from our own existence and perception. Kant, however, does not connect this ontological realism with epistemological realism, which stylizes the experience as a trustworthy source of knowledge about the external world, but rather with *epistemological idealism* (Plato). According to the latter, experience can never lead to assured knowledge. Assured knowledge is generated only from reason (for example, 2 x 6 = 12 in mathematics), whereas human experience does not open any reliable access to external reality. Instead of receiving experiences passively, the human mind contributes actively to the act of experiencing: the human mind casts a structure over the sense data it receives, and organizes, categorizes, and interprets them, so that all knowledge is brought about only through the mind and its categories. There is no raw observation, but only observations that are refracted through the lenses of the categories of the human mind – categories that exist a priori in the heads of human beings. For Kant, sensory experience is thus at all times only interpreted experience. To be sure, there are 'things-in-themselves', 'the noumena' (ontological realism), and these trigger sensory perceptions in us. But we never know the 'things-in-themselves',[12] because all sensory impressions are first organized and processed into perception and cognition by the apparatus of the human mind – through the a priori given spatial and temporal forms of intuition, and the a priori formed categories of our mind, which precede all experience (an example of such categories is 'cause/effect'[13]). For this reason, only the 'appearances' of things, the 'phenomena' are given to us.[14] This position of Kant has also been called 'subjective' idealism – in contrast to the 'objective', ontological idealism of Berkeley.

[12] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (2nd edn; Riga: Hartnoch, 1787); e.g. p. 522; 'The non-sensory cause of these concepts is completely unknown to us.' The Greek Sceptics (since Pyrrhon of Elis, c. 360–270 BCE) had already arrived at this insight: 'No object in itself (καθ' ἑαυτό) comes across to us'; 'We cannot honestly say what the external object is like (ἐστι)' (Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhon* 1.124; also, e.g., 1.135). 'I do not assert that honey is sweet. I do accept that it appears to be so (φαίνεται) (Timon in Diog. Laert., *Lives* 9.105).

[13] Or 'necessary/accidental', 'possible/impossible'. If a particular thing is perceived, the categories of 'unity' and 'reality' are used. If a property of such a thing is considered, the category of 'substance/accident' comes into play. Altogether Kant names twelve categories, which he divides into four classes: (1) quantity: unity, plurality, totality; (2) quality: reality, negation, limitation; (3) relation: substance/accident, cause/effect, community (reciprocity); (4) modality: possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence, necessity/chance. Much has been debated about this systematization, the details of which are of no interest at this point. Mental categories help us to synthesize the large variety of sensory impressions (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, e.g. 14ff, 102ff).

[14] Here E. Husserl (1859–1938) entered in with his phenomenology. The consciousness creates the phenomena of reality, while the existence of the external world remains unproven. Husserl is interested in how the phenomena of the individual levels of cognition (science, everyday knowledge, etc.) are created and how the distinct levels are related to each other. E. Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986).

Kant's eyes were opened by David Hume (1711–76), among other things by Hume's explanations of causality. Hume had already classified causal relationships as a pure addition of the human mind to perception:

> When we look about us toward external objects and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any . . . necessary connection, any quality, which binds the effect to the cause and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find that the one does actually in fact follow the other . . . there is not, in any single particular instance of cause and effect, anything which can suggest the idea of . . . necessary connection.[15]

The insight itself was not new, only its empirical foundation. Before Hume, on the basis of theological reasons (God is the *sole* cause of everything), Occasionalists such as Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715, see n. 21 below) were convinced that there is no 'liaison nécessaire' – no necessary causal nexus – between physical things, or between mental and physical entities (*Œuvres complètes*, II, 316). Thomas Aquinus gave his views on similar Arab-Islamic Occasionalists of the Middle Ages (*Summa contra gentes*, III, 69).

However, not only critical philosophers doubted that we are able to know anything about *causal nexuses* between objects in the external ontic reality. The medieval nominalists based on Aristotle's critique of the Platonic ideas also considered that *universal concepts* (universals such as 'justice', etc.) only exist in human thought. The debate about universals still goes on today, above all in the debate about human dignity. (Can human dignity be found in ontic reality – as something independent from human thinking – or does the human mind attribute it? See below.)

Before Hume and Kant, in 1710, Giambattista Vico achieved the astonishing insight: 'By the fact that we put together these elements [of meaning, which result from our perception], we become manufacturers of truths; we have knowledge, because we ourselves put them together.'[16] Perhaps we even ought to cite the Sophist Protagoras with a dictum that unfortunately has been robbed of its context: 'The measure (*metron*) of all things is the human being: of the existence of things that are, and of the non-existence of things that are not' (in Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a). In the act of gaining knowledge about the external world, the mind actively shapes the cognition.

Also for Schopenhauer, to name one more representative, causal nexuses and concepts of space and time are projected out into the world as human additions to knowledge. However, in the context of his concept of the will,

[15] D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. L. A. Shelby-Bigge; 2nd edn; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 63.

[16] G. Vico, *Le orazioni inaugurali. Il* De italiorum sapientia *e le polemiche* [1710] (Bari: Laterza, 1914), 2.

Schopenhauer, quite differently from Kant, ventured to make assertions about the essence of the 'thing-in-itself'. This was due to his idiosyncratic metaphysic of a primal will as guiding principle.[17]

In the twentieth century, Konrad Lorenz with his behavioural research endeavoured to show that a priori categories of perception and thought are dispositions implanted in us by nature, whereas Jean Piaget looked for their origin in the genesis of the psyche; and the sociology of knowledge laid out the factor of the environment as the matrix for programmed categories.[18]

1.5 Further problems of realism's correspondence theory

In order to rescue the vision of a relationship of correspondence between cognition on the one hand and external ontic reality on the other, realists would perhaps want to bring into play that with each new scientific discovery we supposedly come one step closer to ontic reality; that with each step, with every falsification of a proposition, the scope of the possibilities that remain is narrowed and thus that our knowledge always grows towards an increasingly better representation of ontic reality. But from where do we know that? Only a god could diagnose that our knowledge approaches external being asymptotically – a god who *already knows* what ontic reality 'really' is like. Human beings are denied this knowledge, and consequently every assured insight into the distance between ontic reality and knowledge.[19] To say this metaphorically: Whether our brain paints 'impressionistically' or only 'in the abstract' or even at times 'realistically', we will never find out, as long as we remain human beings.

If only from a 'god' perspective, transcending the human cognitive apparatus, we could diagnose that the two sides of cognition agree, then this means that: without the metaphysical premise of such a third, Archimedian vantage point, epistemological realism's assumption of a correspondence hangs in the air as an unsure hypothesis.

[17] A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819), I–II (Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1987).

[18] K. Lorenz, 'Kants Lehre vom Apriorischen im Lichte der gegenwärtigen Biologie', *Blätter für Deutsche Philosophie* 15 (1941), 94–125; idem, 'Die angeborenen Formen möglicher Erfahrung', *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie* 5 (1942), 235–409. Jean Piaget explained the a priori character of the rational categories by means of developmental psychology. He agreed with Kant that these are not taken over from ontic reality. But they also are not inborn. Rather, they are developed during the individual psychogenesis in self-regulated processes. Cf., e.g., in J.-C. Bringuier (ed.), *Conversations libres avec Jean Piaget* (Paris: Lafont, 1977), 63. On the sociology of knowledge, see chapter IV below.

[19] Thus, also a statement such as that this distance gradually is decreased. Or to put it differently, we cannot rule out that the falsification of a proposition is like cutting off the head of the Hydra, which then grows back new ones, because ontic reality is potentially not as stable as an asymptote.

In order to ground the assumption of correspondence, we might want to postulate with Leibniz in his famous parable of the clock that in creation God brought the two sides of cognition into a 'pre-established harmony' *once and for all time*.[20] It would also be possible to think – as in Occasionalism – that in *every individual* cognitive act the higher, divine spirit regulates the conformity.[21] Such hypotheses would give reasons for correspondence, but in this way the justification problem would just be postponed, because for their part neither pre-established harmony nor Occasionalistic divine direction can be proved. The same holds true for the metaphysical premise of Stoic epistemology: The Stoics speculated that human reason participates in the world-reason that is at work in all reality, so that the crossing over between inside and outside causes no problem. Therefore, correspondence seemed possible to the Stoics.

Descartes also needed a metaphysical guarantor for correspondence between the inner and outer world, between *res cogitans* and *res externa*. In methodical doubt he tore down all certainties, in order to begin anew at ground zero. Setting out from the only thing that is secure, from that which is directly accessible to me, namely, that I doubt and think, I can affirm my existence as a thinking being as long as I doubt (*dubito/cogito ergo sum*).[22] On the basis of this awareness and assuredness of the self, Descartes then regained other certainties. First, he pointed to the logical, mathematical, and metaphysical internal knowledge, the clarity of which pushed him to accept it as true. 'Truth' was thereby equated with 'certitude' (*certitudo*), 'true' with 'indubitable', and *distinctio* (clear differentiation from other concepts) and *claritas* (a clear profile of internal features of a concept) served as criteria for certainty. Finally, he became certain of his conceptions of the *res externa et extensa* by premising that the external world of space and matter is structured mathematically and logically, that is, rationally; the inner mathematical and logical insights, of which he had become certain, allegedly also lead to assured knowledge about the external world. But on what basis do we 'know' that mathematical, logical concepts in our brain find their correspondence in the

[20] Leibniz, *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie*, 2.272ff.

[21] On the basis of medieval Occasionalism, the Cartesian Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), for example, held that God as the only true cause produces all our individual mental states, including our sensory perceptions (cf. Berkeley, n. 11 above). Malebranche, however, did not get lost in naive assumptions of correspondence: in sensory perceptions, the true nature of the material world does not become available, but rather above all that which is helpful or harmful for the body (see, e.g., *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et la religion* from 1688; N. Malebranche, *Œuvres complètes*, 20 vols [ed. A. Robinet; Paris: Vrin, 1958–84]). The last thought anticipates the later pragmatism of James and others (see below).

[22] Strictly speaking, only the act of doubting withstands all doubt, not the 'I' itself, which likewise could be doubted – and has and will (see below on Fichte as well as on brain research). On this critique of Descartes, see more detailed R. Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (Berlin: Weltkreis, 1928; 3rd edn; Hamburg: Meiner, 1966), 226; R. Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Latin-German; ed. L. Gäbe; Hamburg, Meiner, 1959).

external world? Who guarantees this agreement of the *res cogitans* and the *res externa* and with it the accuracy of the inference from the mental conceptions about the external objects to the objects themselves? Decartes could also not get by without the metaphysical assumption of a god who is the guarantor in order to be able to advance to certainties about the exterior world.

Oriented not towards theology but rather towards biology, G. Vollmer and R. Riedl fought for realism in the 1970s with an *evolutionary epistemology*.[23] Our fundamental forms of perceiving and thinking (such as the three-dimensional concept of space) are selected, phylogenetically tried and tested results of evolution, adapted to the environment in an optimal way for our survival. According to the authors, they therefore represent the external ontic reality correctly – at least in principle. But this inference is overly hasty. Only two reasons need to be given. First, the neo-Darwinian presupposition of this theory (adaptation to the environment as a decisive principle of selection in evolution) has become outdated. The environment did not determine evolution as decisively as neo-Darwinists thought. Many organisms survived rather for the reason that they were not closely adapted to the environment, while some that were adapted became extinct. Many remained the same over millions of years in a changing world, or the environment remained constant while organisms changed. Second – and decisively – specifically for the evolution of the brain, which has proceeded according to its own laws, the role of selection by the environment is nowhere conclusively demonstrable.[24]

Riedl's and Vollmer's design serves up anew the old concept of 'pre-established harmony', only creation is replaced by evolution and an assumed god of creation by a decisively effective selection principle of adaptation to the environment. This principle allegedly guarantees the agreement between the object and the subject of cognition.

What surprisingly turns up is: for epistemological realism with its assumption of correspondence, the load-bearing pillar for final certainty crumbled as soon as the philosophical god (or evolutionism's surrogate of god) was lost. Realism's thesis of correspondence ultimately required metaphysics.

1.6 The collapse of logical empiricism

After everything that has been said, realism's assumption of correspondence is exposed as a statement of faith that cannot be proved – even if it abandons metaphysical guarantors such as a concept of god. This is the paradox.

[23] G. Vollmer, *Evolutionäre Erkenntnistheorie* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1975); R. Riedl, *Biologie der Erkenntnis: Die stammesgeschichtlichen Grundlagen der Vernunft* (Berlin: Parey, 1979).

[24] See the critique of the evolutionary epistemology from the viewpoint of (neuro)biology by G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (1994) (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 306–11.

On the other hand, the *logical empiricism* of the twentieth century collapsed for another reason. Naive belief in correspondence did not trouble it.

(A) On the basis of the logic of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, it appeared possible in logical empiricism to present science as a system of logical relationships between empirical foundations and theoretical superstructures, between individual cases and inferred regularities. From the perspective of logical empiricism, propositions that are not purely logical definitions ultimately always have to rely on sense data statements for their verification – sense data statements, to which they have to stand in a correct logical relation.[25]

(B) For Russell, the principles of logic, to which he also traced back the mathematic axioms, exist independently from the human brain and are directly evident to us (independently from sense data). As sceptically as Kant, Russell, however, held that sense data propositions do not give us any satisfactory access to the external 'thing-in-itself'. To be sure, there are 'things-in-themselves' independent from the brain; they elicit sense data in us. What they *are* in ontic reality, however, eludes us to a great extent.[26]

What brought about the downfall of logical empiricism in the 1970s at the latest was its understanding of sense data statements as an allegedly *unchanging* foundation of the structures of knowledge, above which theoretical propositions are in flux – the latter come and go and are replaced with better ones. By contrast, sense data statements are purportedly independent from these theoretical propositions. But this was a fundamental error, as Mary Hesse, for example, proved once again in 1970.[27] There is no observational language independent from theory. The theory forms – shapes – the perception. Observation statements are not immune from theory. They are not protected against being discarded either. And no term of an observation statement is so certain that it could not be subject to reclassification.

[25] Cf. already Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 19–20.

[26] A critical evaluation of logical empiricism since Bertrand Russell and Rudolf Carnap is found, for example, in P. S. Churchland (*Neurophilosophy*, 252–71), who also speaks of the 'collapse' of logical empiricism. For Russell and Carnap, see Russell, 'Logical Atomism' (1924), in R. Marsh (ed.), *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), 321–43; *Problems of Philosophy* (1912) = *Probleme der Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967); *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London/New York: Allen & Unwin/Simon & Schuster, 1948); *Our Knowledge of the External World* (Chicago/New York: Open Court, 1914), et al.; Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*.

[27] M. Hesse, 'Is there an Independent Observation Language?', in R. Colodny (ed.), *The Nature and Function of Scientific Theories* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1970), 36–77. Already much earlier, arguing against Carnap, O. Neurath, 'Protokollsätze', *Erkenntnis* 3 (1932/33), 204–14. Also Paul K. Feyerabend, for example, tore down the allegedly absolute barrier between theory and observation, between fact and interpretation. Cf. his study 'How to Be a Good Empiricist: A Plea for Tolerance in Matters Epistemological', in B. Baumrin (ed.), *Philosophy of Science: The Delaware Seminar* 2 (New York: Interscience, 1963), 3–39, or, e.g., his *Philosophical Papers*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Thus, the empirical foundations of our knowledge are not absolute, not certain for all time. Rather, they are related to the particular surrounding theoretical networks. The observable basis varies to the degree that the theory built above it changes. Moreover, observation statements, which contain categories of space or time, are dependent on our preconceived ideas of space and time. 'Three dimensional space' and 'linear time', however, are – like, for example, also causality – nothing other than programmes implanted in our brain to process the incoming sense data into perception. Without this organizing software we would be swamped in a data whirlpool. The old philosopher from Königsberg (Kant) greets us from afar.

In quantum mechanics, the barriers between theory, observation, and the observed object have been completely demolished. The *location* of an elementary particle (our concept of space plays a role here as a probably inadequate category of observation!) is not exactly fixed; it does not exist independently from the observer, but is dependent on the observation. Not possessing a defined location, a particle is 'spread' over a space and 'decides' on a particular location only when we measure this location. In the frame of quantum mechanics, it is possible to speak of an 'observer-created universe'. Reality is created by means of observation, for example, when our measuring the movement of a subatomic particle constrains a distant twin particle to execute the opposite movement.

In today's situation, in which the optimistic breeze of logical empiricism is blowing away and correspondence-theoretical realism is ossifying dogmatically, the cards need to be shuffled anew. Not least of all, the concept of reality needs to be examined again. What is called 'reality' abides neither exclusively out there in the world, as naive realism would have it, by combining an ontological realism with an epistemological realism (see above), nor is it purely mental alone, as Berkeley thought; an external world without doubt exists (see below). The solution to the puzzle lies somewhere between the two extreme poles of ontological idealism and naive realism. But where in between? 'Reality' is not purely external, but is *mentally constructed* by humans *when they interact with the external world*. In this construction process, however, how extensively should the respective shares of the external world and the mind be appraised? And which interactions play out between the two?

2 On the Concept of Truth

The debate about the *concept of truth* goes hand in hand with the discussion about the concept of reality. In the course of the twentieth century, philosophy with its theories of truth moved away from an (2.1) ontic conception of truth and the primacy of the *object* that came with it, in that (2.2) philosophy considered both the object and the subject of cognition as equally important for the concept

of truth, exploring the *agreement* of the cognition of the subject with its object on the basis of theories of correspondence (see above). However, in the last forty years (2.3) philosophy conceded priority to the cognizing *subject*.[28]

2.1 Ontic truth

Interpreting Plato, Martin Heidegger[29] put the ontic conception of truth on the map once again. Truth is a property of the ontic, of Being itself (*Seinswahrheit*):[30] whenever Being is *revealed,* this state is denoted 'truth' (ἀλήθεια/truth as 'un-concealedness', as 'revealedness'). For Heidegger, truth can only in a completely subordinate way also become a property of a proposition, which the subject of cognition formulates.

Heidegger developed his concept of truth existentially. The subject opens up to Being and accepts its being-in-itself. This 'allowing Being to be' entails the freedom of the subject. In the act of exposing themselves to Being, the subjects experience that Being supports and sustains them. The theological parallel to this existential sketch is clear: the involvement of humans in the self-revelation of Being – theologically speaking, in the self-revelation of God as highest being – liberates and sustains humans, as every good theology of revelation teaches.

2.2 Truth as object/subject correspondence

Tarski,[31] whose so-called semantic theory of truth strongly influenced the analytic philosophies of language, worked on the basis of the Thomistic assumption of *correspondence* (see above) starting in the 1930s. He restricted truth to the truth of propositions: only propositions (*verba*), not things (*res*), can be true. A *proposition* ('p') is true under the condition that the thing (p) expressed by it exists in fact (*'p' is true ≡ p*).[32]

[28] For systematic overviews, see further, e.g., Gloy, *Wahrheitstheorien*; L. B. Puntel, *Wahrheitstheorien in der neueren Philosophie* (Erträge der Forschung 83; 3rd edn; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993); W. Franzen, *Die Bedeutung von 'wahr' oder 'Wahrheit:' Analysen zum Wahrheitsbegriff und zu einigen neueren Wahrheitstheorien* (Freiburg/München: Alber, 1982).

[29] *Sein und Zeit* (1927) (16th edn; Tübingen: N. Niemeyer, 1986); *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1943); *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit: Mit einem Brief über den 'Humanismus'* (2nd edn; Bern: Franke, 1954).

[30] For good reasons Heidegger referred back to Plato, for whom (in an alleged gradation of being) the highest and most complete being was at the same time really *true* Being.

[31] A. Tarski, 'Der Wahrheitsbegriff in den formalisierten Sprachen' (1935, Polish 1933), in *Logik-Texte: Kommentierte Auswahl zur Geschichte der modernen Logik* (ed. K. Berka and L. Kreiser; 3rd edn; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1983), 445–546; A. Tarski, 'Die semantische Konzeption der Wahrheit und die Grundlagen der Semantik' (English 1944), in *Wahrheitstheorien: Eine Auswahl aus den Diskussionen über Wahrheit im 20. Jahrhundert* (ed. G. Skirbekk; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 140–88.

[32] Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1051b–52a. Tarski expounds this text as well as Thomas's *adaequatio* concept to the effect that they allegedly do not talk about an accordance of external reality

Tarski's propositional approach cannot be discussed in detail here. Very helpfully, he is able to indicate under what linguistic-logical conditions a proposition holds true or false. But his deliberations remain immanent in language; they do not leave the domain of formalized languages. The problem is that, with his tools, we cannot leap over to the world external to language. Tarski provides no criteria that allow for verifying whether the linguistic-logical conditions of truth that he identifies are actually *fulfilled* 'out there'. To speak dramatically, everything remains a mere game. 'If this, then that.' But does 'this' in fact exist out there, outside of language? Here Tarski falls silent. The Thomistic formula *adaequatio intellectus REI* ('the intellect measures up to the *thing*' by being in conformity with it), which Tarski emphasized, asked for more than Tarski offers.

The same criticism assails other linguistic-analytical approaches, such as Ramsey and Ayer's *redundancy-theoretical*[33] or Strawson's *performative* approach.[34] Considering the phrase '*it is true that p*', Ramsey and Ayer take the main clause ('*it is true*') to be purely superfluous and therefore the problem of truth to be a pseudo problem, because ''*p*' *is true*' means nothing other than '*p*'. 'It is true that I am bothered with headaches' means nothing more than 'I am bothered with headaches' ('*p*' *is true* ≡ '*p*'; by contrast Tarski: '*p*' *is true* ≡ *p*). According to Ramsey and Ayer, the predicate 'is true' presents a redundant affirmation and not, as in the semantic theory, a necessary, descriptive predicate on a meta-level.[35]

The so-called performative approach on the other hand seeks to mediate between the proposals of semantic and redundancy theory. In so doing, it understands 'is true' not as a superfluous speech act but as a performative affirmation, which like 'yes' in response to a question is a necessary speech act, not residing at a meta-level, but carrying on the communication on the same level on which the question was asked.

There is no need here to enter into the insurmountable problems[36] of both approaches. What is important is that these linguistic-analytical theories of truth remain caught up in propositional logic and therefore in subjectivity (*intellectus*). They do not fathom the depth of the Thomistic *adaequatio*.

with the intellect and mind in general, but specifically only about the correspondence between external reality and *linguistic propositions*, in which mind and intellect are condensed.

[33] F. P. Ramsey, 'Facts and Propositions' (1927), in G. Pitcher (ed.), *Truth* (Contemporary Perceptions in Philosophy; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964); A. J. Ayer, *Sprache, Wahrheit und Logik* (2nd edn; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981); A. J. Ayer, 'Truth', in *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 162–87.

[34] P. F. Strawson, 'Truth', *Analysis* 9 (1949), 83–97.

[35] On truth as a pseudo problem, cf. further Nietzsche and his successors, who released the concept of truth into the wilderness. Truth as 'error': F. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol 11 (ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari; 2nd edn; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1988), 506.

[36] Gloy, *Wahrheitstheorien*, 160–67, for example, gives a good summary.

Realism, by contrast, takes up this task by operating with representation theories (see above). Some epistemological problems of this theory have already been examined. A final one to be mentioned is specifically connected with the concept of truth. One property of an image is that it can have different degrees of quality. There are better and worse likenesses. This property shows how little the representation category helps for clarifying the concept of truth, which tolerates no degrees. There is only 'true' or 'false.' *Vero nihil verius . . . concipi potest*: 'Nothing yet truer than the true . . . can be imagined' (Kant).[37] Thus, in order to be able to connect the concepts of truth and image or representation, we would have to argue that only the absolutely perfect (linguistic) representation could be accepted as 'true'. But then we would wind up again in the epistemological dilemma mentioned above that we, as human beings, will never be able to climb to the Archimedian point, never be put in a position to say with certainty that *hic et nunc* an absolutely perfect representation of ontic reality exists before us. That is, we would never be able to be placed in the position to designate something as 'true'. Only a god in the Archimedian heights would be capable of this.

We escape from the complete circuit only by taking one possible exit: in the framework of a correspondence theory, it is impossible to speak about truth, unless the assurance of a god is accessible. Only such a one would be capable of establishing that a certain human idea about ontic reality agrees with ontic reality itself and *therefore* is true. Everyone who rejects this approach (with the best epistemological reasons) has to abandon the focus on object/subject correspondence and redefine terms such as 'truth' and 'objectivity' by transferring them to the immanence of the subject. How this could look remains to be demonstrated in the next paragraph. Moreover, in the further course of this book, the term 'reality' will be separated from the term 'ontic reality'; it will be transferred into what is subjective ('reality *is* an image').

2.3 Subjective truth

The concentration on the *subject* of cognition led to the concept of truth *immanent in the subject*, which is manifested in different variations.

2.3.1 *Truth immanent in language – propositional logic*

In spite of Tarski's own claim, the linguistic-analytical designs mentioned in 2.2 de facto remain confined to what is subjective: to language. Although Tarski supported the Thomistic claim, they will be accounted for here systematically.

[37] I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (ed. Kgl. Preuß. Akad. Wiss.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902), 400.

2.3.1.1 *Coherence*

The so-called *coherence theory* of truth is oriented toward propositional logic.[38] A proposition is true when it is not only free of inner contradictions (consistency), but fits without contradiction in an entire system of other propositions (coherence). It goes without saying that sense data statements also belong to these other propositions, so that in this way the testing of truth remains dependent on empirical knowledge. The non-substantiable claim, however, that a correspondence must exist between a proposition and the (inaccessible) world of the 'things-in-themselves' is no longer raised in order to determine truth.

Are coherence and consistency already sufficient conditions to establish truth? Propositions like 'Zeus hurls down lightning' fit without contradiction in a certain kind of mythological system. But would we consider this system to be 'true'? There are alternative comprehensive systems for explaining the world. This is to say, as long as such competing systems are offered, as long as humankind has not discovered an *exclusive*, *all-encompassing* consistent system (presumably, this will never happen), coherence and consistency will not serve as sufficient, but only as necessary truth conditions (criteria) – in no case as definitions of truth.[39] It is necessary to search for additional standards that allow accepting one proposition and rejecting another.

2.3.2 *The linguistic-pragmatic concept of truth*

If, in addition to propositional logic, speech *acts* between subjects are considered, this leads to linguistic-pragmatic theories of truth.

In 1973, Jürgen Habermas[40] entered the scene with an intersubjective theory of truth, which was presented as a dialogical *consensus theory*: truth

[38] Cf. in Kantian successorship, e.g. F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (1893) (2nd edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914); B. Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought*, 2 vols (1939) (5th edn; London: Allen & Unwin, 1969); further O. Neurath, 'Soziologie im Physikalismus', *Erkenntnis* 2 (1931), 393–431. In *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), alongside the *consistency* and *coherence* criteria, N. Rescher also identifies *comprehensiveness* (the system takes into consideration all relevant data and offers the greatest possible number of true propositions) as well as *cohesiveness/unity* (every true proposition of the system is directly associated logically with at least some other propositions of the system, from which it follows that the entire system is an integrated logical network).

[39] In Popper's school, H. Albert, e.g., correctly uses coherence not as a definition of truth but merely as a touchstone for falsification of general propositions: do general propositions harmonize with specific propositions without contradiction or not? (*Traktat über kritische Vernunft* [2nd edn; Tübingen: Mohr, 1969]).

[40] 'Wahrheitstheorien', in *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (FS Walter Schulz; Pfullingen: Neske, 1973), 211–65; cf. J. Habermas, 'Vorbereitende Bermerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz', in *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie – Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (ed. J. Habermas and N. Luhmann; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 101–41.

is dependent on the consensus of a language community. The consensus that establishes truth emerges by means of many argumentative speech acts in a dialogue among sensible, equal partners. Habermas does not mean every actual consensus (which is arrived at on the basis of some process of group dynamics, for example by manipulation of one dialogue partner by the other). No contingent consensus is in mind, but a *necessary* one, in so far as every sensible person who might place him or herself in the same dialogue situation would agree. This means that potentially *all* sensible humans must be capable of being in agreement: The validity claim of a proposition that is declared to be true goes beyond individual language communities. It is universal.

Already before Habermas, in 1967, a similar interpersonal verification theory was being contemplated in the Erlangen constructivist school.[41] The predicate 'true' can refer only to propositions. These are established as true through the achievement of a consensus in an interpersonal dialogue among the members of a language community who make up their minds expertly, rationally, impartially, and honestly.[42]

The circular problem of the approach is seen by its representatives themselves: Rationality and expert competence that guarantee consensus for their part must be proved and confirmed, which – according to the approach – can happen again only by consensus, which for its part must be based on expert competence guided by reason, and so forth. More precisely, the conditions under which a reasonable consensus A is achieved must first be guaranteed themselves by a consensus A' (about the conditions of A); a consensus A" then guarantees the conditions of A', etc. With respect to what is 'reasonable' and 'expert', there must always be a consensus, which for its part has to be guaranteed by what is reasonable and expert.

Habermas attempts to escape from this spiral by introducing, as it were, an 'eschaton:' an ideal communication situation in which all participants decide expertly and rationally, without domineering over others or placing private interests over those of others. This ideal situation free from dominance and controlled by reason is anticipated as a goal that is not yet realized. This *telos* determines our conduct in the dialogue. Even though in our dialogue empirically we do not act out the ideal situation, in anticipation we presume it as already operative. The anticipated goal becomes normative

[41] W. Kamlah and P. Lorenzen, *Logische Propädeutik: Vorschule des vernünftigen Redens* (1967) (2nd edn; Mannheim/Wien/Zürich: Bibliographisches Institut, 1973), esp. ch. 4. Also Kuno Lorenz, e.g., concentrated on the consensus of experts ('Der dialogische Wahrheitsbegriff', *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 2/3 [1972], 111–23).

[42] For the system theory of Niklas Luhmann, which will not be dealt with here, truth also pends on intersubjectivity: truth is at hand when all persons would experience the same thing if they focused on the same object. Knowledge asserted to be true is the result of an intersubjective communication regulation. Cf., e.g., N. Luhmann, *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 223–24.

for our behaviour in the dialogue so that, although it is only illusory, the ideal situation with its foreshadowing – like every eschaton – strongly influences the present. Habermas's linguistic pragmatics is often described as 'transcendental'. In my opinion it reflects quite well the structure of eschatological thinking that theology has cultivated for a long time.

Nevertheless, the question for Habermas is unavoidable: According to this concept are human beings ever capable of designating a proposition as *true* if historically they never actualize the ideal communication situation? No. And if they came very close to this ideal situation, would then a proposition accepted by means of consensus be a little less true than true? No. To cite Kant again: *Vero nihil verius . . . concipi potest*, 'Nothing yet truer than the true . . . can be imagined.' The concept of truth tolerates no degrees. Does truth remain an eschatological quantity only in the direction of which one can live?

All things considered, we can say: what the unreachable divine Archimedian point was for the correspondence theories is for Habermas the unattainable 'ideal communication situation': he replaced the former by the latter, one metaphysical quantity for another, in order to be still able to speak about truth. Both approaches, however, imply that human beings in their limited historical existence can no longer label any proposition as true with certainty, because in both cases what guarantees truth lies outside history.

Anyone who is not pleased with this outcome must continue questioning. Would it not make more sense for anyone who wants to stick to a consensus-oriented concept of truth (which we will not do, see chapter VIII) to keep it on the earth, in history? Would it not make more sense to come to a consensus-theoretical variant B that already calls a proposition true when it is only supported by the de facto consensus of a language community, a community whose communication situation is *not ideal*, maybe approaching the ideal but never reaching it completely?

In numerous cases, a proposition designated as 'true' within the frame of variant B would not hold as universal (presumably only in cases like 'the earth is almost round'). Of course, the members of a particular language community *hope* that their propositions are universally valid: they *hope* that this universal validity also would be confirmed, if, for example, all human beings – in a utopian situation – had the chance to vote on a proposition or to reach an Archimedian point beyond human history or an eschaton of an ideal communication situation. Whatever truth condition theorists might want to come up with, in the historical *hic et nunc*, universal validity – which for Habermas cannot be separated from the concept of truth – remains an object of belief and hope that cannot be proved.[43]

[43] Behind Habermas's adherence to the universal validity of the 'true', is there the old longing for the lost certainty that once correspondence theories had feigned – a longing that sneaks back in through the back door under a magic hat? It makes no difference whether we make universal validity of a proposition dependent on an accordance with ontic reality

Granting particularity of truth in the frame of variant B, we would have to concede that every individual language community, each for itself, reaches a de facto consensus about what it would hold as true. Only in this way would it be possible to conceptualize a consensus-theoretical notion of truth that is non-metaphysical, non-eschatological, and focused on the conditions of present history. 'True' then would always mean 'true for us as a language community'. Such a consensus theory that conceptualizes subject immanence without metaphysical support would lead inevitably to a pluralism of 'true' propositions, which, when they rest on consensuses of *various* language communities, will also contradict each other. It follows that the postulate of coherence now can be valid only for propositions sanctioned by the consensus of *one particular* language community. Anyone who does not like this consequence must – if he or she thinks in terms of a consensus theory – retreat to Habermas's eschatological approach. But then he or she, in his or her historical existence that is not characterized by an ideal communication situation, can no longer designate *any* proposition as provably true. We have the choice of deciding. We are master of the process when we define normative criteria of truth. These are the confines within which we operate.

Variant B restricts *coherence, consensus,* and *claims to general validity* to the propositions of one individual speech community, alongside of which, in the historical existence of humankind, other language communities will also always exist. Naturally, each language community will attempt to attract members of the others; some language communities, such as separate fields of science, might even merge. In addition, presumably all humans have already agreed upon a series of propositions ('the earth is more or less round'). Nevertheless, the asymptote, the fusion of all into one single language community, in which the *coherence* of all propositions, the *consensus* of all community members, and the *universal validity* of all propositions are implemented, remains an ahistorical eschatological limit.

Since historical communication situations are not ideal, as, for example, not all participants in dialogue are rational or expertly competent, not even one and the same language community can produce a de facto consensus that includes all participants in the dialogue. Such an accord will appear merely as a consensus of the *majority*. In most cases the argumentations exchanged in the dialogue will not be equally *convincing* to all participants, since not all persons are equally rational, equally experienced, equally informed, or equally emotionally or mentally structured. Thus, in a dialogical consensus theory, the convincingness of argumentations should be a central focus not in an objective way, but in a subjective way that takes into account that

(in correspondence theories) or on a consensus of human beings (in a theory of subject immanence); in both cases it is possible merely to believe and to hope that the respective condition for universality is fulfilled.

experiences of convincingness always turn out differently depending on the individual dialogue partners, that is, on the psychological, intellectual and social presuppositions of each person who hears the argumentations.[44]

The de facto consensus as a criterion of truth will always play a role in *descriptive* language, when historians or sociologists describe how human beings in historical situations arrived at knowledge that they embraced as true for themselves. As a rule, what 'others' in a consensus accept to be true does not leave the individual unimpressed; in this way, social influences, consensuses of others, always play a role in the individual's endeavour to determine what is true or not. This will be confirmed in diverse ways in historical material in chapters V and VII. However, will the consensus criterion also stand up against the critical wind of *normative* language? Chapter VIII will pursue this question – with negative results.

Let us return to Habermas's study. Anyone who reads it cannot ward off the impression that consensus only functions as a touchstone for the presence of truth. At the same time the conditions of an ideal dialogue situation are identified; they would make it possible to achieve the consensus that guarantees truth. Thus, Habermas's focus lies on the question of *how* the claim to validity of a proposition can be substantiated so that truth can be determined – not *what* the essence of truth is. Or does Habermas, in answering the how question, also want to give a definition of truth? Here his study does not attain final clarity.[45]

2.3.3 *The pragmatic concept of truth*

We considered truth immanent in the subject in view of what is *written/ spoken* (propositional logic) and *dialogue* (linguistic pragmatics: the praxis of interpersonal speaking and discussing: discourse/consensus theory). However, it is also possible to connect the *consequences* of what is spoken and discussed with the notion of truth, consequences of a psychological, social, economic, political nature. What effect does a proposition have in day-to-day living and acting (pragmatics)? If we take up this line of questioning, then 'true' is what is useful and beneficial, what helps, what proves worthwhile in the course of living, what calls forth positive life experiences.[46] Or more specifically, in order

[44] Thus, a concept of convincingness will also have to consider psychological and rhetorical factors. Cf. P. Lampe, 'Quintilian's Psychological Insights in His *Institutio Oratoria*', in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (eds), *Paul and Rhetoric* (New York/London: Clark, 2010), 180–99.

[45] On this and other questions for Habermas that will not be broached here, see, e.g., Gloy, *Wahrheitstheorien*, 214–22; Puntel, *Wahrheitstheorien*, 157–64.

[46] Cf., e.g., F. C. S. Schiller, *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (1903) (2nd edn; London/ New York: Macmillan, 1912); *Studies in Humanism* (1907) (2nd edn; London/New York: Macmillan, 1912); then above all W. James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); 'Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment', *The Atlantic Monthly* 46 (1880): 441–59; further J. Dewey,

to be able to apply additional criteria such as coherence and consistence: an idea expressed in language, that is, a *proposition*, is true if believing it serves the life and survival of human beings and their environment.

We should immediately add: if it is useful *in general*, that is, for *most* humans and their environment. 'The earth is getting warm due to emissions caused by human beings.' Certain governments reject this proposition as insufficiently substantiated by the natural sciences. If they did accept it, they would regulate the CO_2 output of their country and thus benefit the globe. This proposition thus is useful in general, even though some people profiting from pollution do not see any benefit for themselves. By way of contrast, if the radius of the possible benefit of a proposition were curtailed to a particular interest, the utilitarian concept of truth would produce fatal consequences. 'The discharge from my factory smokestack is harmless.' This proposition is useful too – but only for a few people, so that it needs to be rejected even from a pragmatist perspective.

What happens here? The concept of truth is transferred into what is practical-ethical; in the spirit of Plato, what is true and what is good are made one and the same. The biblical 'you will know them by their fruits' is translated into 'propositions are true if they produce good fruit.'

Alongside the stipulation that the radius of benefit should reach as far as possible,[47] there are, however, other critical issues to bring up. (A) Let us take the proposition 'there is a God' as an example. It illustrates that usefulness cannot be a *necessary* truth condition. According to pragmatism, belief in God would be proved to be false if it were possible to demonstrate that belief in God has no beneficial value in people's lives anymore. So far, so good. However, if usefulness were a necessary truth condition, God could no longer be conceived of as a sovereign being who is *free* to act *against* the interests of human beings, free, for example, not to prevent floods, tsunamis, or concentration camps. If Job had tied his faith in God to the truth condition of benefit when he was stripped of his former good living and in the dust scraped the boils on his leg with a shard, his faith would have been shattered. For the Bible, helpfulness and usefulness do not present a necessary criterion

Essays in Experimental Logic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916); *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, 1938) (according to Dewey, theories do not represent what is in the world outside; but rather, with their prognostic power, they help us simply not to fall under the wheels in our contact with the world outside); C. S. Peirce, *Schriften I und II* (ed. K.-O. Apel; trans. G. Wartenberg; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967–70). Marxist pragmatic theories of truth also belong here; cf., e.g., H. J. Sandkühler, 'Die Praxis als Kriterium der Wahrheit', in *Praxis und Geschichtsbewusstsein: Studie zur materialistischen Dialektik, Erkenntnistheorie und Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), 249–75. On the viability criterion in constructivism, cf., e.g., E. v. Glasersfeld, 'Die Radikal-Konstruktivistische Wissenstheorie', *Ethik und Sozialwissenschaften* 9 (1998): 503–11, esp. 510.

[47] We could also formulate this more theologically: the consequences of a proposition must be beneficial for as many as possible, not only the strong but also the weak and the minors.

of truth of propositions; in fact, in the Bible it is not a truth criterion at all. Otherwise the surging billows of the problem of theodicy would have washed away belief in God long ago.

A physician's statement informing a patient that he or she is suffering from cancer might have the effect that the immune system of this person breaks down and he or she dies from pneumonia. But this ruinous effect does not prove the pathologist's report to be untrue. Thus, again, usefulness is not a *necessary* truth condition. Conversely, the false statement of a medical authority, 'you have no cancer', might be beneficial if it relieves somebody suffering from cancer to such an extent that the powers for self-healing in the person might be mobilized. This second example illustrates that usefulness is not a *sufficient* truth condition either. Alongside the physician's lie, also the beneficial myths of Easter bunnies or Santa Claus show that usefulness is not a *sufficient* truth condition.

Bertrand Russell illustrated the problematic shortly after the Second World War by means of the sentence 'Hitler exists': 'It is obvious that if I say "Hitler exists" I do not mean "the effects of believing that Hitler exists are good". And to the genuine believer the same is true of God.' A little earlier, on the same page, Russell writes:

> James says (I repeat): 'If the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true.' This simply omits as unimportant the question whether God really is in His heaven; if He is a useful hypothesis, that is enough. God the Architect of the Cosmos is forgotten; all that is remembered is belief in God, and its effects upon the creatures inhabiting our petty planet. No wonder the Pope condemned the pragmatic defense of religion.[48]

(B) It might be right to object that our argumentation up to this point, especially that of Bertrand Russell, sounds as if the old assumption of correspondence (see sections 1.2–1.5; 2.2 above) has again sneaked in the back door as a premise. However, even apart from this argumentation, it is possible to launch an attack against 'benefit' as a truth criterion. Anyone who only looks pragmatically at what is helpful in order to find what is true quickly serves up a salad of contradictions ('Santa Claus brings all gifts', 'at Christmas, the Christ child brings all gifts' [in Europe, these contradictory traditions exist side by side], 'the parents buy all the presents'). Such a person must consequently call in the coherence criterion, but then faces the question how he or she can proceed to select between contradicting propositions by means of the usefulness criterion in order to achieve coherence. The benefit of all three statements mentioned is *the same*. (All three, for example, help

[48] B. Russell, 'William James', in *The History of Western Philosophy* (1945) (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 818.

children in late autumn, when it is impossible to play outside, to stay in check: 'XY brings all presents' implies 'but if you are not good, then . . . .')

(C) To solve the dilemma, we might want to squeeze a menacing rod in the hand of Santa Claus (as some European traditions do) in order to increase the pragmatic suitability, but then we can also argue that thereby the helpful character of the idea is reduced, because an element of anxiety is added. In other words, we now run into the next problem of pragmatism. Who decides what is beneficial, and how does someone decide? Is a threat useful? It might perturb children, whereas some parents understand it as a guiding handrail put up out of love.

Furthermore, how should one proceed in the case of belief in God? Should we in four long lists write down the beneficial and harmful practical consequences of belief in God and of atheism, and should we then at the end look at the bottom line to decide whether belief in God or atheism is true? Above all, what happens with propositions whose lists remain blank because they do not set forth either anything helpful or harmful? Are these propositions true or false? *Tertium non datur*.

(D) A relatively recent book documents how little a list with a positive balance would prove the 'truth' of belief in God. On the one hand, this book shows that groups with faith in God had a survival advantage in the history of the human species. Religion has generated altruistic, cooperative groups that bear up better against selection. On the other hand, an atheist authored the book. Usefulness did not convince him of the truth of belief in God.[49]

In spite of the death sentence that the motif 'helpful in life' just received as a normative criterion of truth, we will not lay the motif aside as a descriptive criterion when we ask below (chapter VII) what in history de facto convinced and convinces individuals or groups of the truth of particular propositions. In praxis, useful effects of propositions, helpful for living one's life, do play a role when decisions are made about the acceptability of propositions. Historians or sociologists observing these processes cannot bar historical protagonists from actually using this motif as a truth criterion. However, aside from the descriptive aspect, in a normative perspective, benefit benefits nothing. As a normative truth criterion it is utterly useless (chapter VIII).

2.4 Parallel moves toward the subjective

Alongside philosophy other scholarly disciplines have directed their attention towards the subjective. In literary studies the concept of truth is not under debate, but rather the meaning of the text. Still at the beginning of the twentieth century, in literary studies, the author and authorial intention stood at the centre of literary theory. Only by concentrating on this did it seem

[49] D. S. Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

possible to get meaning out of texts. By contrast, the first half of the twentieth century directed its attention to the text itself, to the structures immanent in the text, its *intrinsic structures* out of which – even against the author's intent – meaning arises. Finally at the end of the twentieth century, we experienced the turn towards the recipient: reader response criticism, reception aesthetics, and history of reception concentrate on the effects of the text, on readers who produce meaning.

Something similar goes for rhetoric. In the so-called new rhetoric the primordial axiom of ancient rhetoric broke apart, the axiom that *res* and *verba*, the factual side of speech and its linguistic formulation, content and form, are clearly distinguishable and that the *verba* have to 'represent' the *res*. For proponents of new rhetoric, for whom the distinction between *res* and *verba* has become problematic, it is no longer possible to understand the ascertainment of truth as a linguistic approximation to a reality that exists separately from language (such a concept echoes epistemological correspondence theories), but rather to conceive of reality as something constructed by thinking and speaking subjects: The *verba* do not represent or depict reality but rather generate it.[50] With this the foundation of classical rhetoric crumbles and with it the concepts of 'rhetorically elaborate *representation*'.

[50] The new rhetoric draws consensus-theoretical consequences from this insight – like Habermas, but even earlier; e.g. Chaim Perelman in his theory of argumentation (C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971]; C. Perelman, *Das Reich der Rhetorik: Rhetorik und Argumentation* [München: Beck, 1980]). If reality is understood as a construct, truth rests on always revisable consent to constructs. 'Since argumentation is directed toward theses, with which different publics agree with different intensity, the status of the elements dealt with in an argumentation is not unchangeable as in a formal system, because the status indeed depends on the . . . consent of the auditors' (55). Similarly, e.g., St. Toulmin, *Der Gebrauch von Argumenten* (Kronberg: Scriptor Verlag, 1975): apart from 'final criteria', truth is found in the consensus of those who are ready to dialogue.

Chapter III

The Brain as a Designer

1 Neurophysiological Reasons for Constructivism

The old Thomistic presumption of correspondence has disintegrated. It always expresses no more than a hopeful belief, which never can be proved, as will be supported in the following pages with the help of evidence from neurobiology. The subject who engages in cognition has moved to the centre; the recipient of sensory data creatively generates reality for himself or herself. At the conclusion of chapter II, section 1.6, we raised the question of the extent to which the mind and the external world each participate in this construction process.

From the palette of attempts to give an answer, in which philosophers, natural scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and brain researchers of various shades have participated, I select *constructivism* as in my opinion an important contribution in the camp of theories that promulgate a concept of truth immanent in the subject. Increasingly since the 1980s, constructivism in various forms has been articulated from interdisciplinary perspectives.[1] Building on the negative discovery that perception and cognition do *not* stand in an assured representing relation with ontic reality (which bade farewell to naive realism) and that even refined cognitive methods are unable to bring our cognition verifiably closer to ontic reality, the basic thesis of constructivism is: the subjects of cognition produce their own reality. The subjects construct it. *Reality is a construct of the brain.*

A simple example illustrates this.[2] The boundary between our body and the exterior world appears to us in our reality to be sharply drawn. We experience this boundary as a self-evident, everyday reality about which we do not reflect. Nevertheless, this reality is simply a construct of the brain. Injuries in certain areas of the brain cause this scheme to become confused, so that the injured persons consider parts of their body to be foreign objects or not to exist. Their cerebrally constructed reality has changed.

Perception and cognition are constructive activities, as can be illustrated in an even more detailed way than before (in chapter II, section 1.3) by means

[1] See the selection of titles marked with '(*c*)' in the bibliography below.

[2] Cf. G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (1994) (3rd edn.; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 281.

of the example of perceiving colour. The fact that we perceive a plant to be green has little to do with the extra-cerebral external world described by the natural sciences in which there is no colour.[3] In the world of the physicists (likewise only a construct), electromagnetic energy oscillates in various wavelengths (from 10^{-5} to 10^{17} nanometres). A minute part of this spectrum (between 380 and 780 nanometres) has an effect on our visual apparatus, and not even ultraviolet and infrared wavelengths can be seen; gamma and radio waves are also beyond our perception. Waves of this small portion of the spectrum stimulate the retina – not, however, in such a way that the retina directly passes the electromagnetic stimuli of the exterior world on to the brain. Rather, the retina *translates* these stimuli into encoded neuronal signals, which on their part set several specialized regions in the brain into action. Simultaneously, though spatially separated, these specialists in different regions of the brain develop individual contributions to what will later be perceived as colour, form, three dimensions, and movement. The individual contributions are then brought together and, in an awe-inspiring way, assembled into a single optical image of a green plant swaying in the wind. Not only the stimulations of the retina, which had been transposed into neuronal codes, induced this image, but also older images stored in our memory influenced this picture,[4] even our expectations and interests.[5] While the optical perception of brightness corresponds to a particular *amplitude* of the electromagnetic waves 'outside' in the world of physicists, that is, to a given amount of energy in the waves, a particular *frequency* of the electromagnetic waves corresponds to the green of the optical image. Is it still appropriate to speak of a similarity between what is 'outside' and its internal representation, given that nothing more than a neuronal code serves as the link between the two? The neuronal code exhibits properties *other* than the electromagnetic waves.[6] To summarize, the perception of colour is a construct achieved by the brain. The fact that in the course of this construction process apparently *all* of us see green has to do with the similar blueprint and the same kind of functionality of our brains, that is, basically with intersubjectivity.

At this point one can justifiably object that the physicists' image of the external world is likewise only a constructed reality (and to this extent is itself only an internal representation). But if we cannot even avoid the fact that between the 'external' world constructed by physicists, in which no colours

3 Thus Newton already in 1704: 'The [light] rays, to speak properly, are not coloured. In them there is nothing else than a certain Power and Disposition to stir up a Sensation of this or that Colour' (*Opticks* [1704; 4th edn.; New York: Dover Publications, 1952], part II, proposition II).

4 On memory as an important organ of perception, see what follows shortly.

5 On the latter see, e.g., J. H. Maunsell, 'The Brain's Visual World: Representation of Visual Targets in the Cerebral Cortex', *Science* 270 (1995): 764–69.

6 On this in detail see below. Cf. also the citations from Kant and Leibniz above (chapter II, n. 9).

exist, and the colourful subjective world experienced by us an irritating gulf opens up, then it is reasonable to assume that an even deeper chasm yawns between the external *ontic* reality and our subjective world of experience, to which ultimately also the world constructed by physicists belongs. This conclusion *a minore ad maium* can hardly be avoided.

The gulf between the world of the physicists and our perception of colour stretches even wider when we consider the strange phenomenon of what is called *colour constancy*. Perception of consistent colour – for example tomato red – does not originate, as might be assumed, as a result of the retina being excited again and again by the *same* wavelengths of light. No, different wavelengths of light can evoke the sensation of the exact same colour. If this were not so, our world at sunrise would be drastically more different from our world at midday. A blue object in a house illuminated by lamps can reflect the same wavelength as a gold coin in the yard in sunlight; or when the light changes, a green leaf on a brown twig may reflect the same wavelength as the branch did earlier. When one puts on yellow ski goggles, shortly afterwards the snow appears to be white again. Thus, the colour information does not originate in the cones of the retina at all, but in our head as the result of a complicated calculation in which the colour is computed in relation to the *context* of the red tomato, for example other vegetables in the basket.[7]

What applies to colours holds analogously, for example, for odours or tunes. In the world independent from the brain these do not exist. In the acoustic world of the physicists, perceived pitches and volumes correspond to frequencies and amplitudes of waves of air pressure. Molecules in an elastic medium like air oscillate in waves that are distinct because of their frequency and amplitude. This is all there is. Music originates in the head. And when in a drugged state from LSD the neuronal code produced by the inner ear is not conducted to the cerebral auditory areas but to the visual areas, then instead of sounds, wild visual experiences are produced.

Not even the round shape of a perceived object can be attributed to the reality of an external world; a round formation exists neither on the retina nor in the corresponding retinotopic part of the brain. The brain does not depict the outside world; it creates its own pictures.

Current brain research questions the distinction – promulgated by critical realism and already advocated by Descartes, Locke,[8] as well as Russell[9] –

[7] Cf. D. Jameson, 'Opponent-Colours Theory in Light of Physiological Findings', in D. Ottoson and S. Zeki (eds), *Central and Peripheral Mechanisms of Colour Vision* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 8–102; D. Jameson and L. M. Hurvich, 'Essay Concerning Colour Constancy', *Annual Review of Psychology* 40 (1989): 1–22; D. G. Myers, *Psychology* (6th edn; New York: Worth Publishers, 2001), 187–88.

[8] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690; 4th edn, 1700; ed. P. Nidditch; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[9] B. Russell attributed an existence independent from the brain not only to the logical principles that are evident to us, but also to what he called universals, that is, to the Platonic ideas, or

between those parts of our perception that correspond directly to external reality as an objective nucleus of perception (for instance, geometric characteristics such as 'round') and those parts that our cognitive apparatus contributes subjectively.[10] In light of current brain research, it makes sense to say that the brain constructs *everything* that we consciously experience.[11]

The constructivist position thus harmonizes with results that cognitive neurobiology has produced.[12] Our brain is not in direct contact with the external world. On the contrary, contact is mediated through sensory receptors, which in a large measure select the input[13] and whose methods of selecting depend on the species. The various species of living creatures have developed sense organs with different make-ups corresponding to the necessities of their life – some even developed infrared or magnetic sensors – so that although they move about in the same biotope, they live in differently perceived worlds ('worlds of experience').

Selecting from the ocean of energy surrounding us, our sense organs react to only a modicum of elementary events in it, for example to only specific light or sound waves and their simple properties (frequency and amplitude). The huge excess of the selected elementary events is not available for use in the perception process; thus, the input of the external world is minimal. All other contents of perception – such as colour – are made accessible by the brain; they are constructed. This is to say: just as our sense organs do not receive a great deal of what takes place in the exterior world, inversely our perceived world contains a great deal that does not exist in the exterior world.

Most notably, everything in perception that has meaning remains without external correspondence. Meaning does not emerge until the brain compares and combines the incoming sensory data, and assembles them into meaningful units, then into objects and finally into scenes. This *meaning-generating*

general concepts ('justice', 'similarity', 'black', geometrical qualities such as 'triangular', etc.) (*Problems of Philosophy* [1912] = *Probleme der Philosophie* [Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967], 81ff.).

[10] The Greek Sceptics already spoke of a mixture (μῖγμα) (Sextus Empiricus, *Phyrr.* 1.124).

[11] Cf. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 306–11.

[12] On the following topoi of research in perception, see in more detail Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 228–49, 280. For a convincing refutation of the critique of neurobiologically oriented constructivism – a critique presented by R. Nüse et al. – see pp. 312ff. The refutation does not need to be repeated here. Cf. R. Nüse, N. Groeben, B. Freitag, M. Schreier, *Über die Erfindung[en] des Radikalen Konstruktivismus: Kritische Gegenargumente aus psychologischer Sicht* (2nd edn; Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1995).

[13] Cf. above the minute part of the spectrum of electromagnetic waves that we see. We are surrounded by an ocean of energy of which we are unaware (in the world as constructed by physicists). We do not even perceive all that we actually could take in, but only what benefits us: boring constant stimulation (the pressure of eyeglasses on the nose, stale air in the study) is noticed only initially and then fades out of the presently constructed reality. Our apparatus of perception turns selectively towards new things that can inform us, so that we can cope with life.

construction process does not happen arbitrarily, but takes place according to rules, which on the one hand were predetermined during the phylogenetic and early ontogenetic development of the basic configuration of the brain,[14] and on the other hand became available later by means of individual experience in contact with the external world. That is, we perceive in the light of *past* experiences.[15]

Memory thus serves us as a 'sense organ' of utmost importance. It empowers us to recognize objects in *categories* – as elements of a particular class of objects. It enables us to connect details of perception; our brain *combines* characteristics, because this makes sense in the light of previous experience. In this way, unity of perception is achieved. Above all, memory helps to achieve meaningful perception by allowing us to *supplement* a current sensory perception with missing data.

> [The neuronal] networks of memory that represent gestalt perceptions [are] not only activated ... when *all* details of the gestalt are at hand ... Only fragments of current sensory data sometimes suffice to generate in us a complete perceptual image, which then does not come from the sensory organs, but from the memory ... The more familiar a situation or a gestalt is to me, the fewer 'key data' are needed by my perceptual system in order to generate a perceptual image that is conceived as complete and fits these key data ... [This means that] with increasing contact with my environment, the memory plays a progressively greater role in the formation of my perception.[16]

Correspondingly, the danger of error increases when, for example, after the reception of a few basic indicators a scene is too hastily classified as familiar and new details are ignored. With the help of only a few simple key data an image of one's wife might be constructed that, in all male obliviousness, misses possible changes ('she went to the hairdresser'); the failure to notice might have disturbing consequences.

Our perception is a highly creative achievement of the constructing brain. As a rule this perceptual setup makes it easier for us to interact with a complex environment (if we leave aside the last example). However, the constructed contents of perception are never capable of being anything more than mere 'hypotheses about the environment'.[17]

[14] For visual perception, for example, one such rule is that objects move if parts of their background disappear and become visible again. In this way, we are often fooled into believing that the train we just boarded is moving, although the train beside us is actually moving away.

[15] On memory, cf. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 242.

[16] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 245–48.

[17] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 249.

Our glance into the broad chasm between the 'external world' of physicists and the subjective world of experience can be even more intensified. Between these two worlds, a third one – the world of neuronal events – both mediates and separates. This world of nerve cells does not represent, as we have seen, objects and incidents of the exterior world, but it converts elementary characteristics selected from the exterior world into a neuronal code. Our sensory receptors translate the received stimuli that are generated by physical-chemical events of the environment into the code of nerve impulses so that what reaches the sensory centres in the brain is completely different from the stimuli of the environment.[18] Whereas events of the environment and their effects on the sense organs seem to be *specific*, the nerve impulses aroused by them are unspecific: the neuronal code is *neutral*. It has to be neutral so that the various cerebral sensory systems can communicate with each other. Is the *specificity* consequently lost forever? Evidently not, since the contents of our perceptions are specific. Once the specificity has been reduced to naught, how does it come into play again? Only in that it is created anew. It is regained by the fact that the indistinguishable nerve impulses excite different locations in the brain, for example the centres responsible for vision or hearing, or, to give a more fine-tuned example, the spatially separate cerebral areas that are specialized in preparing for the visual perception of colour, form, three dimensions, or movements (see above). In this way the brain *interprets* the neutral neuronal impulses that come from the sense organs. Put dramatically, if we connected the nerve paths coming from the ear with the visual centre and the neuronal paths originating at the retina with the auditory centre, we would perceive 'Blue Wonder', that is, we would see jazz and hear Picasso. An LSD-induced drugged state might, as indicated above, activate such a wild circuitry. But maybe we should rather illustrate with a clinical example. When an adult who was born blind and whose brain never could develop a normal centre for vision during childhood[19] becomes sighted by means of eye surgery, he or she finds it exceedingly difficult to interpret what is newly experienced. The brain is insufficiently equipped to interpret the nerve impulses coming from the optic nerves. It is not trained to attribute

[18] 'The transition from the physical and chemical environment to the perceptual states of the brain constitutes a *radical* break. The complexity of the environment is "squelched" by its decomposition into excitation states of sensory receptors. From these, in return, the brain through numerous mechanisms must extrapolate the complexity of the environment, insofar as it is relevant for survival' (Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 102). 'The brain . . . only has its own excitations, whose origin and meaning it must *extrapolate*' (p. 91). What is new here is only the neurophysiological precision, not the basic idea. See the citations from Leibniz and Kant above in chapter II, n. 9.

[19] In ontogenesis, the motor centres of the brain develop before the sensory centres. Children develop normal modality-specific areas in their brains (such as the sight centre) only by means of motor activities and their sensory feedbacks. Cf., e.g., Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 284.

meaning to the signals that are now being received – an example that the stimuli coming from the environment are not invested with meaning. Rather, meaning is generated mentally. Visual perceptions are constructs 'that the brain creates by interpreting neuronal patterns of excitation'.[20]

The brain interprets, identifies, categorizes, generalizes, abstracts. It constructs the subjective world of experience that we call 'reality'.

2 Does an External Ontic Reality Exist?

From the character of reality as a construct, it does not follow that constructivists intend to slide over into solipsism, according to which the world for human beings exists only in their ideas – in the sense of 'only I exist, everything else is my imagination'.[21] No, an ontic reality independent from us and from the functions of our brain does exist. Humans are even capable of *experiencing* it in parts, but they cannot *cognize* what it 'really' (i.e. ontically) is like. The ontic world is capable of being *experienced* to the extent that it constantly sets up barriers against our actions. These resistances – ontic barriers – provide a decisive reason for assuming that ontic reality exists. But this 'world of objective obstacles, of ontic barriers, between which we act', remains 'in principle inaccessible and indescribable'.[22] The object of our descriptions is not ontic reality, but reality constructed by us. Our brain produces the latter; the brain develops all differentiations that make up our world of experience, the phenomenal world.

Furthermore, the brain itself provides a second, though admittedly weaker reason for assuming that an ontic reality independent from the brain exists. When I assume 'that reality is a construct of the brain, then at the same time I have to assume [that there is] a world in which this brain, the constructor, exists'.[23] Conversely, if I did not assume the existence of ontic reality apart from the brain, I would end up in aporias, for instance in this: my brain on the one hand produces the world, thus this world as a construct of the brain is contained in the brain and therefore is a part of it; on the other hand my brain is part of this world. This paradox is resolved if I distinguish between an *ontically real* brain (epistemically inaccessible to me) and a *real* brain that is available to me through neuroscience and belongs to my constructed phenomenal world ('real/reality' here assumes the meaning of 'constructed

[20] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 116.

[21] Even so-called 'objective idealists' like Berkeley avoided solipsism by interpreting sensory data as being infused by God (see chapter II, n. 11 above).

[22] E. von Glasersfeld, 'Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit und der Begriff der Objektivität', in *Einführung in den Konstruktivismus* (Schriften der Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung 10; München: Oldenbourg, 1985), 19.

[23] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 288.

reality' opposed to 'ontic reality'). On the one hand, the *ontically real* brain, located in ontic reality, produces *reality,* that is, the constructed world of experience. *Reality* thus is contained in the *ontically real* brain. On the other hand, *reality* contains the *real* brain accessible to me by brain research.[24]

The strength of this second argument lies in the fact that it ignores the fatal strict dualism of *res cogitans* and *res externa* promulgated by Descartes. In a Platonic fashion, the Cartesian concept (see chapter II, section 1.5 above) separated the *res cogitans* of the human being from the spatial-material *res externa*, although the *res cogitans* is without doubt closely tied to the *res externa*.

Nevertheless, there is also a weakness of the second argument. Taken on its own, this argument – 'the ontic brain is a part, a subset, of ontic reality' – would still leave room for the possibility that my ontic brain's share of ontic reality approaches 100 per cent, that is, that ontic reality exclusively consists of my brain, so that again nothing would exist outside my brain, and all our perceptions would be but a dream. The ontically real brain would be identical with the universe. As unusual as this sounds, it is a possible conclusion – close to Berkeley's position, who as a bishop, however, postulated a god alongside his brain universe. Do we want this closeness to Berkeley's ontological idealism?[25]

If the constructing, ontically real brain were *not* a subset of but the totality of ontic reality, we would run into difficulty explaining the *resistances* that restrain our actions in the world of experience. We would then have to accept that the ontically real brain constantly evokes in me perceptions of resistance, that is, that it not only acts for my benefit, but also uncomfortably or even dangerously against me. If the resistance offered by the blow of a deadly car crash, for example, were merely an illusion created by the ontic brain, then we would have to assume that the ontic brain *itself* switches off its work of constructing and that it destroys its own constructions, clearing its hard drive (and maybe starting a new construction of a different self). This is a possibility. But, applying Occam's razor, we probably want to choose – on purely aesthetic grounds – a leaner, a less complex hypothesis that explains the resistances experienced by us more easily. If all data that are available to us can be meaningfully accounted for in a lean theory, we prefer it to a competing, more complex theory. So runs the basic aesthetic principle of all science, one of the rules we follow when constructing reality.

[24] The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* reverberates in this argumentation: Because there are human ideas of the world (constructs), there must be an active subject of these constructions that is not identical with them.

[25] For ontological idealism, see chapter II, section 1.3 above.

That ontic reality exists apart from the brain can also be argued – on the basis of the same aesthetic principle – in the following way. As Bertrand Russell, for example, asserted,[26] the hypothesis that all our perceptions are 100 per cent illusory dream material is again the more complex hypothesis (because it forces me to assume that, for example, I dream that I dream, and that I dream that I wake up from dreams, etc.). This hypothesis unnecessarily complicates things, whereas the simple inverse hypothesis that an ontic reality independent from the brain triggers sensory perceptions in us explains all.

We can draw a bottom line. Are propositions about ontic reality possible? No, except that this ontic reality exists, that it sets up resistances ('ontic barriers') against our actions, and that it contains the constructing, ontically real brain as a subset.

To be sure, we can still *ask* where this ontic reality exists. But we cannot get an answer. When

> we say it exists 'outside' or 'beyond' the [constructed] reality [of our phenomenal world], we formulate spatial propositions that make sense only inside my [constructed] reality. [Ontic] reality does not exist behind or beyond [our constructed] reality, and one cannot look at it out of 'holes' in [our constructed] reality.[27]

We thus differentiate between two spheres:

Reality (*Wirklichkeit*)	Ontic Reality (*Realität*)
Constructed by the brain	'Objective'
Dependent on consciousness	Independent from the brain
The phenomenal world, the world of experience	A trans-phenomenal world
The world inside the mind	Setting up resistances to my actions
Capable of being described in language	Incapable of being cognized and of being described
My real brain, as it is described by scientific brain research, is a subset of it.[28]	My ontically real brain, which constructs reality, is a subset of it. Nothing more can be asserted about the ontically real brain.

[26] *Problems of Philosophy*, chapter 2.

[27] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 322. German constructivist authors differentiate between *Wirklichkeit* (constructed reality) and *Realität* (ontic reality). The English language does not allow for such a distinction.

[28] In the process of brain research, the *ontically real* brain generates a construct of itself, that is, it constructs the *real* brain. In the following chapters 'reality' (in the sense of 'constructed reality') will always be distinguished from 'ontic reality'.

The differentiation between (constructed) 'reality' (*Wirklichkeit*) and 'ontic reality' (*Realität*) is constitutive for the constructivist approach. Constructivist authors like Gerhard Roth never use *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität* synonymously.

In summary, science only describes the phenomena of constructed reality. Nothing but this reality is given to us in the act of cognition. As long as human beings are bound to their historical existence, all optimism remains unwarranted that perhaps one of the Platonic cave dwellers will be able to turn his or her back on the shadow theatre on the wall of the cave and ultimately will be able to climb up to the sunlight in order to see ontic reality.

3 The 'Other', the 'Self', and the Freedom of the Will as Realities Constructed by the Brain?

If propositions about the composition of ontic reality, which is inaccessible to me, are impossible, it does not follow that for the cognizing subject there are no 'true' or 'verifiable' elements of knowledge. By all means they exist even after the loss of the correspondence premise. However, on the basis of subjective truth (see chapter II, section 2.3 above), they only exist as constituent parts of the constructed reality, of the so-called world of experience, which comprises both our everyday world and the world constructed by scientific research (see further chapter VIII). The elements of knowledge that are accepted as 'true' constitute the building stones out of which the subject constructs his or her reality cognitively. This world of experience is not identical with ontic reality; the make-up of ontic reality cannot even be inferred from the world of experience, since by no means, as we saw, is it assured that ontic reality reproduces itself in a world of experience that is similar to it.

For illustration, let us focus on our contact with other human beings. The ontic reality of the 'other' with whom we deal every day is capable of being *experienced* to the extent that it often enough sets up barriers against our actions. We are incapable, however, of *knowing* the ontic reality of this human counterpart. This 'other' is given to us only as a cognitive construct, as a model, as a design. Therefore, the cultivation of one's image and advertising play a large role in the interpersonal sphere.

In interpersonal interaction our model of the human counterpart is confirmed as supposedly correct, or it is altered. It can also be 'objectified', which for constructivists means that intersubjectivity is produced: other subjects adopt our model of this human being (especially when they are impressed by experts such as teachers or psychologists who support our model). But in spite of such objectivity – read: intersubjectivity – it still remains: we interact interpersonally with a constructed model of the 'other'. This holds for every interpersonal relationship – not only for 'blind' lovers,

who form an 'image' of their partner that after a year turns out to be an illusion. What emerges after this 'disillusion' is not a view of the ontic reality of the partner, but simply another model of this person constructed anew.

The same holds for the interaction with one's own 'self'. Cognition of one's own self and of the processes taking place in the self, as Kant already asserted against Descartes, is in no better position than cognition of the external world. Dealing with one's own self is for constructivists an interaction with a model, with an image of the self, thus with a cognitive construct. The 'self', the 'I', is nothing other than a creation of the ontically real brain. The ontically real brain produces a reality 'in which an "I" exists that experiences itself as the *subject* of its mental acts, perceptions, and actions, possesses a body, and faces an external world'; 'I myself am a construct.'[29] This means, 'reality is not a construct of my "I"'.[30] Rather, an ontically real brain, inaccessible to me and *not* identical with the 'I', is the constructor.

The ontically real brain not only constructs the 'self', but also a neuroscientific image of the brain, an image that depicts neurophysiological conditions and processes. Is, therefore, the brain described by brain research to be identified with the 'self'?[31] It is not that easy, because today's neuroscience holds that the 'self' is only a certain state of consciousness *within* the – scientifically depicted – brain.

Moreover, brain research has challenged the traditional idea that the 'I' with its will produces my actions. A faction within the guild of neuroscientists contends: 'The "self" as the author of my actions appears to be an illusion. My brain plans my actions (or reacts as a reflex), *before* I realize' that planning goes on.[32] Volitional acts of the 'self' thus do not produce the motor actions of the body parts. In a number of sensational experiments, Benjamin Libet and others tried to show that the (scientifically constructed) brain, on an unconscious level, starts to prepare a movement long[33] *before* I feel that I decide to move one of my limbs in a certain way.[34] What I experience subjectively as volitional act of the 'I' does not seem to trigger this movement.

29 Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 293; cf. further, e.g., 232, 290–95.

30 Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 284.

31 Hume identified the neurophysiologically describable brain (a place where sensory impressions flow together and states of consciousness follow each other) with the 'I', the human 'mind'. In a revolutionary way for his time, he denied a special substantiality and identity of the 'I'/'mind,' and saw it thus no longer as a coherent entity (*simplicity*), but as a mere 'heap or collection of different perceptions united together by certain relations, and supposed, though falsely, to be endowed with simplicity and identity' ('Denial of the Substantiality of the Mind', in *Works*, vol. 1 [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889], 1.534).

32 C. S. Soon et al., 'Unconscious Determinants', *Nature Neuroscience* 11 (2008), 543–45.

33 Between 350ms and 10s, depending on the study.

34 Already in 1983, Benjamin Libet together with C. A. Gleason, E. W. Wright, and D. K. Pearl published 'Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activity (Readiness-Potential)', *Brain* 106 (1983), 623–42.

Already *before* the sensation that I decide to move my finger to my forehead, an unconscious 'readiness potential' in the brain allegedly induces the carrying out of this action.

Is the idea of 'free will' thus rebutted? Hardly so – for several reasons. (A) Libet was wrong in presupposing that humans are able to exactly state the moment in which they feel they make a decision. Experiments by Keller and Heckhausen proved the contrary.[35] (B) Theoretically the conscious perception of making a decision might be simply a delayed echo of what – as an act of free will – unconsciously goes on earlier. The concepts of 'free will' and 'consciousness' are not necessarily tied together. (C) But we do not even need this theoretical crutch. Recent experiments refuted that Libet and others succeed in separating the actual decision making from the perception of making a decision. In 2008, an experimental study by C. S. Herrmann and his team demonstrated that the unconscious brain activity in the 'readiness potential' does not prepare a *specific* movement; it only *generally* prepares the motoric apparatus for action. Thus, it does not determine which one of two alternative motoric actions a subject chooses.[36] In other words, the actual decision to move my right finger to a spot above my eyebrow is not made in the 'readiness potential'.

In our constructed reality, therefore, our everyday notion that a volitional act – the 'self' feels in this act that it makes a decision – induces a motoric action has not become obsolete. At least in our constructed reality, in our world of experiences, in which scientific and everyday knowledge come together, experiments such as Libet's have not dealt a blow to the concept of free will yet.

But this does not prove that, in the ontic world, we actually do have a free will. The *ontically real* brain, which is hidden from me as a limited human being, constructs not only several images (the 'self' as well as the brain as it is seen by neuroscience), it also decides if I should move my finger right now. That is, the active subject of my freedom, if this freedom then exists, is epistemically hidden from me. Once more we have to admit with Kant that we are incapable of achieving any conclusion when we ask whether we are free or not. We cannot look down to the ontic basis of our constructed reality.

[35] I. Keller and H. Heckhausen, 'Readiness Potentials Preceding Spontaneous Motor Acts: Voluntary vs. Involuntary Control', *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology* 76 (1990), 351–61. Subjects sometimes even identified the moment of their conscious decision making as being 800 ms *after* the corresponding movement of the body had begun.

[36] C. S. Herrmann et al., 'Analysis of a Choice-Reaction Task Yields a New Interpretation of Libet's Experiments', *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 67/2 (2008), 151–57. Differently, however, Soon et al. (2008), who, on the basis of the brain activity preceding the awareness that a decision is made, claim to be able to predict about 60 per cent of the outcomes of simple choices.

Whereas for Kant pure reason does not achieve any result at this point, at least Kant's practical reason does attain certainty: whenever an unconditioned command puts the self into a choice situation, the self becomes aware of its freedom; it can always disobey.

Fichte chose this Kantian certainty of freedom as the starting point for his entire philosophy. However, in the process of his philosophizing, he also exposed the 'I' as a mere fabrication, in a way foreshadowing later neuroscience. How could this happen? Fichte took several steps. First, he thought of freedom so radically that he also applied it to his epistemological concept. In the cognitive process, the 'self' acts with absolute freedom, without – as in Kant – being bound to the input of the 'thing-in-itself', an input transformed and interpreted by the cognitive apparatus, according to Kant. For Fichte, at this stage of his thinking, a world independent of the brain did not exist. The world was nothing other than a mental design of a freelance self. Berkeley had already asserted something similar (see chapter II, section 1.3 above); the early Schelling followed this line of Fichtean thinking.

What is fascinating is that after conceptualizing the absolutely free 'I', outside of which nothing else exists, Fichte, second, also hurled this lonely 'I' into the abyss of nothingness. If freedom is absolute, then nothing inhibits conceptualizing the abolition of all being:

> All over the place I do not know of any being, not even about my own ... I myself ... am not. Images ... fly past, without there being anything for whom they hover past ... images that do not represent anything, without meaning or purpose. I myself am one of these images. In fact, I am not even that; I am only a fuzzy image of the images. All reality turns into a marvelous dream ... without a mind who dreams.[37]

The Fichte of 1800 would have been pleased with today's brain research. But perhaps then also the distinction between 'I'/'mind' on the one hand and the ontically real brain on the other would have occurred to him. It did not. He had to find his own exit to escape the hell of nothingness. By, third, fathoming the notion of freedom even more deeply than before, he saved freedom from self-annihilation. How did he achieve this? He allowed it to *limit* itself, that is – in the conflict between the absolute and the finite – he allowed it to surrender itself to the death of its own absoluteness in favour of an absolute deity. We will not continue farther on this path of Fichtean philosophy.

Instead, it is worthwhile to swing back to Occasionalism, which grappled with the question of how what is mental, that is, perception and volition, could interact causally with the quite differently structured material world; how, for instance, our will is capable of inducing the motion of a leg. The answer,

[37] J. G. Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800) (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1976), 78.

deduced from the doctrine of God's omnipotence, ran: this capacity belongs only to God, not to human beings. The Cartesian Nicolas Malbranche (1638–1715), for example, explained that God, as the *only* cause, creates movement in our body by creating the body anew from moment to moment. When these permanently new acts of creating, which sustain creation, occur in distinct locations, the body moves. Human freedom consists of consenting to what God alone causes.[38] Malebranche would have had great pleasure in Libet's experiments and presumably would have eagerly diagnosed divine power in the cerebral 'readiness potential'. Correspondingly, Malebranche would probably have equated our subjective experiences of free acts of volition with the human consent to God's act. In this way, a dusty leather-bound volume from the antiquarian bookstore would be 'substantiated' by experiments – without, however, any advance in knowledge being attained. In the thirteenth century, Thomas distanced himself from the Occasionalism of Arab-Islamic philosophers by interpreting the concept of God's omnipotence in such a way that sovereignty also implies the *delegating* of power, so that the creature itself becomes empowered to act freely.[39] But do we have this power?

The sobering discovery remains: the 'I' with its perceptions is a firmly set component of the reality constructed by the ontically real brain. But what the ontically real brain is, whether it is characterized by free will, is withheld from our understanding. We can only say: the ontically real brain feigns to us in everyday life that our 'self' bends a finger on its own free will or right now, reading this, juts the bottom lip out with scepticism.

4 Gaps between Scientific and Everyday-Knowledge Constructs of Reality

4.1

The example of Libet illustrated that the ontically real brain is capable of generating two conflicting constructs of reality, an everyday construct and one from the natural sciences. We also saw that the ontically real brain, on the one hand, constructs the perception of the colour red on the basis of a particular stimulation (inaccessible to me) from the ontic reality. On the other hand, it drafts the scientific picture that this stimulation from the external world is colourless and consists of merely a particular frequency of electromagnetic waves (accessible to me and measurable numerically in nanometres). 'Red' is

[38] See chapter II, n. 21 above, especially his *Réflexions sur la prémotion physique* from the year of his death (1715). See further, e.g., Malebranche's older contemporary Arnold Geulincx: 'Geist und Körper interagieren nicht direkt, sondern nur durch Gott vermittelt' (*Arnoldi Geulinex Antverpiensis Opera Philosophica*, 3 vols [ed. J. P. N. Land; The Hague: Comitum, Martinum Nijhoff, 1891–93]).

[39] Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.69–70; *Summa Theologica* I.83.1.

in a ratio to the statement 'an electromagnetic wave frequency around 700 nanometres stimulates the visual apparatus of the (scientifically constructed) brain so that it sees red' in the same way that the proposition 'my "self" is the author of motor functions' is in a ratio to Libet's thesis 'a "readiness potential" of the (scientifically constructed) brain puts my motor action in gear'. Each construct is inconsistent with the other.

We could be tempted not to leave the respective two pictures on the same level, but to resolve the contradiction by cascading them: the ontically real brain constructs the image of the scientifically described brain, and then this scientifically delineated brain constructs 'red' and 'I myself'. The category mistake, which thus would sneak in, is obvious. The science brain is nothing other than a constructed image. It cannot itself come on stage as an actor, not as a constructor of images itself. Pictures do not paint. Only if I deny the image character of the science brain as in naive realism ('the natural sciences show us how ontic reality looks'), fusing the world of phenomena with ontic reality, only then could I assert that the scientifically described brain devises the images of 'red' and 'I myself'.[40]

4.2

A further point can show that the ontically real brain is able to paint two conflicting pictures when constructing, on an everyday level, the 'self' and, on a scientific level, the brain with its neurophysiologic events. The 'self' senses perceptions as direct. On the neurobiological level, however, considerable time of up to a second passes between a stimulus on the periphery and the conscious perception of the stimulus; the 'self' blocks out this delay.[41] On the level of what the 'self' feels, the ontically real brain, which constructs our reality, feigns a directness to us that cannot be found in the brain delineated by brain research (and likewise constructed by the ontically real brain). In this way two constructs contradict each other:

- One construct comprises the familiar conceptions that the 'self' has, that is, everyday knowledge: 'The perceptions of the "self" are direct.' 'I perceive myself as a distinctive being with a specific history.' 'I sense myself as one with my body,' etc.
- The other construct involves knowledge from the natural sciences: 'Peripheral stimulus and conscious awareness of the stimulus do not occur at the same time contrary to the feeling of the "self",' etc.[42]

[40] Cf. similarly Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 289; 325–26.

[41] Cf. B. Libet, 'Neuronal vs. Subjective Timing for a Conscious Sensory Experience', in P. A. Buser and A. Rougeul-Buser (eds), *Cerebral Correlates of Conscious Experience* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1978), 69–82.

[42] On the controversial question, what is 'consciousness', which here will not be dealt with at length, see the informative material in Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*,

The second, scientific level corrects so to speak the first, the pre-scientific one – like physics and neurophysiology debunk the everyday perception of colour ('the tomato is red') as cerebrally processed stimulation of human sense organs by electromagnetic waves of different lengths ('a tomato is not red; its surface simply reflects electromagnetic waves of a particular length, which stimulate the optic nerve; the latter's neutrally coded firing, which exhibits characteristics other than the external electromagnetic waves, excites a visual centre in the brain to produce the perception of red'). In this way the constructing, ontically real brain adds deepening alterations and corrections to the reality that it has constructed. However, it would be an illusion to assume that by climbing down from the pre-scientific everyday level to the deeper level of scientific knowledge, we achieve the transition from constructed reality to ontic reality. Naive realists merely *believe* this.

4.3

Can we at least hope that the deepening of everyday knowledge by the natural sciences draws our constructed world closer to ontic reality than the everyday world of experience could and that with further advances of scientific research we could inch ever closer to ontic reality? In fact, we ought to *hope* for this. No one would want to make a case for regressing to the pre-scientific age, believing that the natural sciences are a dead end and that everyday knowledge is more reliable. Nevertheless, from an epistemological point of view, we will never be able to prove that we are coming closer to ontic reality, because that would presuppose, as we have seen, a 'divine' or Archimedian standpoint outside ourselves, from which it would be possible to compare the scientifically constructed world with ontic reality. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to do that. We do not know the asymptote, the limit towards which we attempt to move with our research. For this reason, we never know the distance to ontic reality, which constitutes this limit. This means we will never *know* with assurance that the *ontological quality* of one construction of reality (e.g. a scientific one) is superior to the ontological quality of another (e.g. an everyday one). We will always be able to maintain only that the *construct of the natural sciences coheres better with all of our empirically based propositions, fitting more coherently in the totality of our knowledge*, or that it makes life easier than the everyday construct does. But these qualities are of a propositional or of a utilitarian, but not of an ontological nature. Those who mix the categories are playing tricks

192–225; H. G. Schuster, *Bewusst oder unbewusst?* (Weinheim: Wiley-VCH Verlag, 2007). Consciousness appears above all when the brain has to cope with new cognitive and motoric tasks for which it does not yet possess completed neuronal networks, but must create new neuronal paths and networks. The more prepared networks it possesses for a function, that is, the greater the routine is to which a task is subjected (e.g. assembly line tasks), the more unconsciously the task is accomplished.

on themselves. Only if we knew anything about the ontological quality of a construct could we assert something about the proximity to or the distance from ontic reality. And only if we knew anything about the distance to ontic reality could we assert with confidence that the reality constructed by the natural sciences is a 'likeness' of ontic reality. Otherwise, the category of likeness is closed to us (see chapter II, sections 1.3; 1.5; 2.2 above).

Chapter IV

Objectivity as Intersubjectivity: The Interface with Sociology of Knowledge

After the crumbling of the Thomistic premise of *adaequatio*, we had to conclude that our constructed reality is objective only insofar as it is intersubjective and social. We thus have arrived at the interface between constructivist epistemology and the *sociology* of knowledge. For the constructivist, 'objective' is 'that knowledge that proves to be useful . . . in intersubjective, supra-individual, institutionalized contexts. The collective usefulness of knowledge directs the attention . . . to social contexts.'[1] We have arrived at the constructivistically oriented sociology of knowledge and its insight that 'the social, that is, culture-specific constructions appear to be "external," "objective" realities to the individual'.[2] From this definition of objectivity, however, it also follows that the elements of knowledge that have been handed down from generation to generation, collectively tried and tested, ought never to claim 'a higher ontological status than the knowledge of social outsiders'.[3] Both the latter and the former knowledge represent constructed reality, and not ontic reality.

A brief and highly selective historical excursus on the sociology of knowledge may be appropriate. The sociology of knowledge of the twentieth century differed from the Kantian position by doubting the a priori character of the categories of the mind and by suggesting a connection between the categories of thinking and social conditions.

The term 'sociology of knowledge' goes back to Max Scheler.[4] Although Scheler postulated a realm of eternal values and ideas, he conceded that so-called 'Realfaktoren' (material factors) determine human thinking in various historical, social, and cultural systems. Scheler could even speak of the 'powerlessness of the mind' in relation to material factors.

[1] Horst Stenger and Hans Geißlinger, 'Die Transformation sozialer Realität: Ein Beitrag zur empirischen Wissenssoziologie', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 43 (1991): 247–70, esp. 250.

[2] Stenger and Geißlinger, 'Die Transformation sozialer Realität', 250.

[3] Stenger and Geißlinger, 'Die Transformation sozialer Realität', 250.

[4] See above all M. Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Neue Geist Verlag, 1926; repr. Bern: Francke, 1960), which contains 'Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens', pp. 60–135; M. Scheler (ed.), *Versuche zu einer Soziologie des Wissens* (Munich: Dunker & Humblot, 1924).

For Emile Durkheim,[5] the origin of the central categories of perception, at least in primitive societies, lay in the social structure. The mental classification of things reproduced the societal classification of human beings.

Karl Mannheim[6] called the dependence of the structures of thought on societal conditions the social 'attachment' of knowledge to 'existence'. For him, subjects who are positioned differently in historical-social space exhibit unavoidably different structures of consciousness. Like Scheler, Mannheim expanded considerably the Marxist basis-superstructure model. Alongside economic relations, biological, psychological, mental, and even supernatural factors condition knowledge just as well. Mannheim insisted on sociologically investigating the conditions that lead to the genesis of cultural products, ideologies, and political philosophies, and to the rivalry of systems of thought. Such a sociology of knowledge would make it possible for intellectuals to take a step back and adopt a standpoint of observation superior to intellectual competitors. Mannheim demanded a special role for such a sociology of knowledge in political life.

The subsequent sociology of knowledge expanded its field of research topics. No longer did it focus only on the grand philosophies and worldviews. Everything that counts in society as knowledge was examined, including everyday knowledge (Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann among others).[7] Every person of the everyday world 'constructs' her or his 'reality'. Sociology of knowledge has been investigating what role society and personal development play in this.

Finally, the scientific production of knowledge also has become a topic of sociology of knowledge. The production of the natural sciences – the 'fabrication of knowledge' in the laboratories, in which society is condensed – is conditioned by society and culture.[8] As has been demonstrated above, *in*

[5] See among others E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, 'Quelques formes primitives de classification: Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives', *L'Année Sociologique* 6 (1903): 1–72; E. Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (1912) (5th edn; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

[6] See above all K. Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie* (ed. K. H. Wolff; Berlin/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964); furthermore K. Mannheim, *Konservativismus: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Wissens* (1924) (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984); K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (1928–29) (7th edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1985).

[7] E.g. P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1970); N. Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und semantische Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, vols 1–3 (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Surkamp, 1993), vol 4 (1999); and many others.

[8] Thus K. Knorr Cetina, *Die Fabrikation von Erkenntnis* (2nd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Surkamp, 1991); K. Knorr Cetina, 'Das naturwissenschaftliche Labor als Ort der "Verdichtung" von Gesellschaft', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 17 (1988): 85–101; cf., e.g., B. Barnes, D. Bloor, and J. Henry, *Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis* (2nd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); D. Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (2nd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); H. Collins and T. Pinch, *The Golem: What Everyone Should Know*

respect to its ontological character, scientific knowledge can no longer claim a special quality in the current discussion. Rather, in *this* (and only this) respect it is revealed as a sibling of everyday knowledge. In this way, different forms of knowledge are set anew in relation to one another. The special status of scientific knowledge – for all its distinctiveness[9] – is passé when the ontological quality is under consideration.

The mental construction of reality takes place both as an achievement of the individual subject – the result of which is subjective reality – and of the society, the result of which is 'objective', that is, intersubjective and therefore social reality. If this social production were lacking, we would all be *idiotai*, each spinning our own reality, incapable of communicating meaningfully with each other.

Seen from a neurobiological point of view, the fact that such intersubjectivity is possible cannot be taken for granted at all. As we have documented, our brain, which is isolated from other brains, receives only the neutral neuronal code that the nerve paths convey from the sense organs. This is all. The individual brain has to construct meaning by itself. With this situation as a starting point, how is communication among several brains possible? The more similar the structures of two central nervous systems are, the more favourable is the prospect that both brains will assign the same meanings to the stimuli that are conveyed to their sensual organs; both will come to the same result that, for instance, an object in front of us is red. By means of such at least similar classifications a 'consensual sphere' is developed[10] in which two individuals participate and that conveys to them the feeling that they adequately understand each other. I am less similar to a bee – the longer wavelengths from the red sector whizz by its visual organ without stimulating anything in its brain – than to a bull. Bulls see red, the bee does not, and in their brains, in distinction from bees, ultraviolet rays generate no visual effect.

We live in different consensual spheres, which we can picture as concentric circles. We share the inner circle with most complex animals. In it, certain

about Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); J. Kurucz, *Ideologie, Betrug und naturwissenschaftliche Erkenntnis* (Saarbrücken: Verlag der Reihe, 1986); B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (2nd edn; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); A. Pickering, *Constructing Quarks: A Sociological History of Particle Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and many others.

[9] Not only the formation of concise and coherent theories characterizes scientific knowledge, but also formalized language combined with mathematics; falsifiable propositions; strictly controlled methodology; empirical tests on the basis of experiments, controlled observations, exact measurements, etc. The precision is attained because formal networks of relationships between isolated and formalized data stand in the foreground – while an abundance of content is relegated and relinquished to the humanities, which then often succumb to the danger of clouding it over with foggy language.

[10] H. R. Maturana repeatedly makes use of this expression (*Erkennen: Die Organisation und Verkörperung von Wirklichkeit* (2nd edn; Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Wieweg, 1985).

stimulus-response models hold for all participants: something sweet tastes good, electrical shocks are unpleasant; if a large shadow draws close or an object approaches very speedily, a threat is felt, and so forth. We share one of the next largest circles with chimpanzees. And the farthest-reaching basis of understanding and communicating connects us with those human beings whose brains not only are like ours in structure, but were also similarly moulded in life: these persons were brought up in a similar way, similar images of the world were taught to them, they possess a comparable foreknowledge, and they lived through similar individual experiences. With them we have the best mutual understanding; even small gestures are readily given the same meanings by them and by us. Nevertheless, let us not fool ourselves: 'Understanding puts special demands on us, misunderstanding does not. Misunderstanding is . . . the normal state of affairs,'[11] often without our noticing.

[11] G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 300.

Chapter V

A Constructivist Sociology of Knowledge Model

How did the Christian construction of reality, which originated in the first century as an alternative to pagan Roman-Hellenistic conceptions of the world, come about? An impressive achievement of construction is laid down in the New Testament. Are there models at hand that might exhibit something like 'general rules' for constructing reality and hence would be useful as heuristic instruments for the historian of early Christianity? According to which laws does constructing reality usually take place? Under what conditions is the process of construction carried out both on the individual-subjective level and on the societal-'objective' level? How is the transfer between the two levels ensured?

The following rules of construction can be derived from what has been worked out already (see chapter II, section 2.3 above). They can be brought into play as a heuristic tool for *describing* the processes of construction that take place in day-to-day living. Whether all of them should be also used in *normative* language as rules of construction is another question, which chapter VIII will investigate. That in day-to-day living the act of constructing does not follow all of these rules is understood.

Linguistic level: rules immanent in language

- Consistency: A new proposition that is to be accepted must be free from contradicting itself.
- Coherence: The proposition must fit without contradiction into a propositional system that is already in existence.
- Aesthetics: If a simpler hypothesis within the propositional system can contribute the same thing as a more complex one, the simpler one is to be preferred ('ideal of succinctness', also known as Occam's razor).
- Coherence with and connectedness to empirical knowledge/experience: (1) For the most part, also empirically achieved propositions belong to a propositional system. A new proposition tested for acceptance needs to be in a coherent relationship also with these empirically gained propositions. But this is not all. (2) 'Comprehensiveness': There should be even a relationship free of contradiction between the new statement and all empirically gained propositions that have *not* (yet) been integrated into the given propositional system.

Pragmatic level

- Sensory interaction with the external world/experience (observations, experiments, inductive gathering of cognate cases, striving for repetition of experience, etc.): in determining *how* it is possible to achieve an 'assured' empirically based proposition, the individual sciences follow strict rules of procedure, which will not be worked out in detail here. Such methodical rules also exist in everyday life, when, for example, we ask for as many eyewitnesses as possible, or when we require that an empirically based statement is confirmed every time we repeat a particular sensory interaction with the external world; otherwise we are not ready to accept this statement as a proposition about reality ('the aroma of lavender calms people down', 'cirrus clouds herald rain'). The daily routine also uses induction.
- Usefulness: When a proposition proves itself in day-to-day living by being helpful and useful, we gladly use it as a building block for our construction of reality; it may even elicit positive feelings. Usefulness represents only one of several possible factors[1] that can elicit positive emotions toward a product of construction and thus motivate the constructor to prefer this product to others.

Linguistic-pragmatic Level

- Consensus/intersubjective confirmation: An intersubjective consensus about the new proposition is established. The more other individual subjects, especially 'experts', give endorsements, the more certain a proposition appears.

If rules such as these are followed and their conditions satisfied, a proposition makes sense in praxis: evidence appears – and thus a new building block for our reality construction has been accepted.

Can this skeleton of rules take on the flesh and blood of a specific case? Will additional categories that play a role in processes of construction be discovered in this way? In order to link epistemological constructivism with the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, two sociologists at the Free University of Berlin, Horst Stenger and Hans Geißlinger, in fascinating empirical analyses investigated *how* social reality comes into being.[2] What processes of construction play out in this? Under what conditions do groups form their reality?

[1] Examples of other factors are: (a) A product of construction portrays the constructor especially positively and as a result will readily be accepted in praxis, although often by the grid of the other criteria it would have to collapse. (b) A product captivates by means of its elegance. What was called 'the ideal of succinctness' above is merely a special case of this. (c) A product is accepted because it opens up a perspective of hope for the future, although this hope, if all the other criteria were employed, would be unfounded, etc.

[2] I select from their studies as especially helpful the paper mentioned in chapter IV note 1 above, and I amplify it on the basis of what has been worked out up to this point with further material.

Defining their terminological field, the two authors start with the concept of meaning. For constructivists, the 'meaning' that phenomena of a constructed reality have is the product of a constructive achievement. People, animals, relationships, physical objects are not meaningful 'in themselves'. Rather both the individual subject and a society – a culture – construct meaning. How do they do this? Two steps are carried out, according to the two authors. First, we get to know a phenomenon when a *signification* is attributed to it. For example, the flat object in front of me is 'paper'. With this signification, however, meaning is not yet given to my present situation. Why is there paper in front of me? To blow my nose? To read something? *Meaning* is attained in a second step when I place this signification in relation to other denotations: for example, when I state that I write down notes on this paper because my memory is insufficient to keep a long series of thoughts in mind. The other significations with which 'paper' is linked are 'writing', 'note', 'thoughts', and 'memory'. Combining such units of content produces meaning. A larger milieu of meaning put together from such building blocks is also called *context*.[3] The context defines the particular meaning of a signification. We gain knowledge by perceiving significations in contexts.

A subjective context exists in the mind of an individual subject. This mental context becomes a *social context* when the subject makes it public and is able to convince other subjects to accept it. In this way, the mental context becomes objective, that is to say, it becomes intersubjective. A collectively shared milieu of meaning now exists, which moves the actors in a situation to a consensus about what is happening.

Inversely it holds that social contexts become subjective. This can happen when a subject in the process of socialization adopts a social context and repeatedly uses it. Such a thing is then a routinized production of meaning. Today's Western churches are feeling distressed that such a routinized production of meaning – in Christian homes, in a Christian village community – is becoming more and more rare. The character of a 'people's church' is fading.

One characteristic of constructed contexts is that they are based on *axiomatic positings*: the psychoanalytic context is based on the assumption of the unconscious, a theological context is based on the assumption of a God who acts powerfully and reveals God's self, and so forth. With the unfolding and differentiation of a particular context, *categories* are also made available that allow the content of the axioms to be experienced. Within the framework of the psychoanalytic context, the processes and structures of the unconscious become *observable*. Or, within the theological context, God is

[3] Instead of 'context' or 'milieu of meaning', we could equally well say 'constructed reality', 'constructed system', or something similar. Correspondingly, 'social context' means the same thing as 'intersubjectively shared construct of reality'.

experienced, whether it is in the history of Israel, in the work of a Nazarene, or – as among the Corinthians – in pneumatic-charismatic experiences like glossolalia. In these ways, axioms and categories produce evidence. The context authenticates itself.

Stenger and Geißlinger report a two-week field experiment in a retreat centre in the Upper Palatinate, during which a group of young teens from Berlin-Kreuzberg (twenty-eight ten-to-twelve-year-olds) transformed their everyday social reality to the effect that at the end all group members were convinced that (a) their dreaming at night was interrelated with underground streams under their sleeping quarters, even *reciprocally* interrelated, to the extent that the streams not only stimulated the dreaming, but conversely, the level of dream activity also changed the water level in the streams. (b) In addition, at the end they were convinced – now their new social reality not shared by us becomes completely fantastic – that a map could be drawn from the places about which they dreamed, and that in a nightly walk through the Upper Palatinate, which actually took place, these sites became 'accessible' to them: it became possible for them, awake and completely conscious to walk into a dream and its territory. During this nightly hike through the nature of the Upper Palatinate, they saw a bison sleeping in an open field, a mole's mound towering up to two metres, a doorframe standing in the middle of the countryside without a house, and a waterwheel turning in the river without a mill.

How do such experiences come about, which sound fantastic only for someone who has the misfortune not to have a share in the new social reality of this group?

First, two truisms need to be mentioned. (a) The first deals with the factor of time. If someone had presented the new view of reality at the beginning of the retreat, this view would have crashed into pieces under resounding laughter; the old social reality would have been too self-evident. New social contexts only develop gradually step by step.

(b) A further condition for emergence concerns space. The retreat centre was relatively shielded from the everyday external world. In such favourable conditions the old social reality was restructured after only two weeks. Here lies the key to the success of youth sects.

The new context unfolds in several steps – before and after the establishment of its axiomatic basis. (1) On the second day of the retreat, two announcements were slipped to the participants. One was that there was a stream of water running under the building. The other was that in the previous night three participants had 'strange dreams'. The second bit of information was manipulated, because in fact no one had reported their dreams after waking up in the morning. What was to be understood by 'strange' was not put in concrete terms. Both bits of information were interspersed very casually and each at a different place in the morning programme. On the second day of

the retreat, these represented units of information that stood unconnected with each other and did not yet have any 'meaning', because, to repeat, not until such building blocks are related to each other does a context of meaning arise. Not until then does the work of constructing a new context begin.

(2) How does it happen that units of content are connected with each other? Several steps to this end are necessary.

(a) A unit of content must become *relevant*.

(aa) On the second day, the signification 'strange dreams' as a *category of perception* had been imparted to the group. On the third day, five participants promptly picked up this category of perception in order to characterize their own dreams: these five also had experienced 'strange dreams'. In other circumstances they perhaps would have labelled their dreams otherwise or would not have spoken about them at all. Among the teens there was now the experience of 'strangeness'. *Experience* creates relevance.

(bb) Furthermore, relevance results from *repetition*. On the fourth day – from the point of view of the participants for the third time – twelve teens reported that they had woken up from 'strange dreams'. By repetition what is accidental is separated from what is structural, illusion from what supposedly is factual. By repetition the knowledge was established that in the group obviously something special existed and in fact even spread, because twelve had already experienced 'strange' dreams.

(cc) The *spreading* that was thus manifested presents another prerequisite for a unit of content to become relevant. The spreading can affect everyone. It has become possible, if not likely, that every participant will experience the 'strange' phenomenon.

(b) Relevance was thus established. The group no longer had any choice but to devote itself more intently to the 'strange dreams' and to deal with them with organizational effort. On the fourth day, a dream office opened as a place to register extraordinary dreams. In this way, the building block 'strange dreams' was *institutionally objectified*.

(c) Already on the fourth day, *first constructs of meaning*, that is, connections of units of information, occurred. On the third day, some teens had awakened with a sweet fragrance in their noses, which had been applied under their noses while they were asleep at night – this was now the second manipulation of the experimenters. On the following day, only a few kilometres distant from the retreat centre, the teens found a sweet-smelling stone in the spring of a brook. This presented the third manipulated element.

Manipulation of the conditions at the starting point of an activity that is to be investigated – in this case the activity of constructing a new context – is normal for every experiment. The goal of the experiment was indeed not to prove the influence of streams of water on human organisms – then a methodological bombardment would be justified – but to study the

mechanisms and laws that play a role in the construction of social reality. The essence of the experimental laboratory is that the conditions at the starting point of the processes that are to be studied are set up artificially.

Being confronted with the mentioned conditions, the participants began to construct combinations entirely by themselves, and thus started to create the first building blocks for the axiomatic basis of a new social context. They combined:

- The fragrance of the stone (sensory perception) is identical with the sweet smell when they woke up (memory of a sensory perception).
- The strange dreaming (the relevant, intersubjectively experienced, and institutionally objectified unit of content) is interrelated with the sweet smell, because this odour was perceived at the time of waking up in the morning.
- For its part, the sweet fragrance is connected with the spring of a brook (observation).
- An underground stream flows under the sleeping quarters (a remembered bit of knowledge).
- The brook and the underground stream are both flowing water, and they are located only about three kilometres from one another (observation).
- *Ergo*: There is a connection between increased dream activity and flowing water.

(d) In order to substantiate this, that is, to increase the evidence, on the fifth day an 'expert' was brought in, an uninitiated local dowser, who actually found several intersecting streams of water under the sleeping quarters. The group marked them with stakes. The 'expert' officially confirmed the suspected connection.

(3) Three typical sources of evidence so far influenced the teens' process of constructing. Such sources of evidence ensure that constructs creating reality are by no means arbitrary. Such constructs are based on evidence, on the certainty that things are just so, and they for their part then become a matter of course, suitable for the testing of new other constructs.

(a) The first source of evidence was *sensory perception*.[4] The production of new meaning, by means of connecting units of content, requires empirical experiences. In our case, 'strange dreams' were experienced, at two different locations a fragrance was detected, and a stone was found in a spring at the source of a brook.

Knowledge is established, as we saw, not *directly* from sensory stimuli. Before something new can be perceived by the senses, the subject must provide categories of perception, which presuppose knowledge already in existence. With the help of the categories of perception already present in the mind, the subject raises questions and thus enables him or herself to perceive

[4] See the corresponding rule noted above under 'pragmatic level'.

something, to find meanings and attain new knowledge. Only in this way are contexts of meaning produced that are based on sensory experiences.

In the case of the experiment in the Upper Palatinate, first, the category of perception of 'strange dreams' was provided before the teens had the experience of such dreaming. People living in the jungle might serve as another example; on a walk in the forest they are able to distinguish far more tones of green than a Bedouin who grew up in the desert, although the retinas of both receive the same rays of light. The categories of perception of the two persons are different.

(b) The second source of evidence was *cognitive construction*. The teenagers of the field experiment connected several elements of knowledge. Cognitively they constructed combinations that became evident to them because of two rules of construction: at least in everyday life, evidence emerges because of *coincidence* and *congruence*.

The connection between dreams and the sweet fragrance in the sleeping quarters was accepted on account of the temporal and spatial concurrence (coincidence) of the two phenomena. Alternatively, when it rains and I simultaneously notice that I am in a bad mood or have back pain, I can construct from this a connection that is plausible for me. Or alternatively, every time that Mrs B. goes to work as a waitress in a nightclub on Wednesday evenings, at midday Mr B. is in a bad mood at the bus stop. Our experience of this coincidence leads to a specific picture of this man that is achieved by cognitive construction: Apparently Mr. B. is excessively jealous.

By contrast, evidence by congruence appears when correspondences or similarities are discovered: the fragrance of a stone from the brook was identified with the sweet odour the participants smelled when they woke up. In this way the connection between dreams and water made sense. Or the so-far constructed reality of my neighbour Mr B. resembles another observation that he does not tolerate children romping around in his front yard. The construct 'excessively jealous' gains plausibility with this congruence: evidently this neighbour has an anxious fixation about safeguarding his 'property' (his wife as much as his yard). The plausibility of the jealousy construction is further increased if still other congruences are discovered. In the 'Dear Abby' section of a magazine, we read that the spouse of a hotel manager is jealous of the hotel guests of his better half. Thus, apparently something like this exists. *Ergo*, it will also apply to the neighbour Mr B. Certainty is transferred from the story of the 'Dear Abby' column to the case of the neighbour by a conclusion by analogy. A large number of propositions in historical scholarship rest on this principle. Historians cannot get by without conclusions by analogy. If in cases A, B, and C, which are well documented in the sources, certain developments took place, case D, which resembles them in a number of aspects but is less well documented, hardly differed in any essentials, we assume.

Notwithstanding, we need to keep in mind that, as mere onlookers, we are perhaps completely in error with such constructions, and the good neighbour's Wednesday blues are due to some other reason (in the middle of the week he is dead tired because on Tuesdays *he* works through the night as a waiter).

(c) The third source of evidence is *social confirmation*, relying on the judgement of others, especially of experts.[5] For things that lie beyond the possibility of one's own sensory perception (streams of water under the building), the subject who constructs reality has to rely on the statements of other subjects (a dowser). Only a few human beings have envisioned the earth as a sphere in the universe. But long before photography most humans relied on experts, who after centuries had finally succeeded in establishing the spherical form of the earth as something intersubjectively self-evident. Thus, social confirmation for me no longer consists in the fact that an expert in physics explains the spherical form to me, but rather in the simple fact that all the people around me consider the spherical form as a self-evident reality. If I were to doubt this social reality and were to maintain in an attack of regression that the earth is flat, I would exclude myself in an idiotic way from my community.

It becomes important for the constructing subject to learn to distinguish the purveyors of social confirmation according to their credibility. Authority must be ascribed to different persons according to the situation: on the trial date, to the lawyer; in the sick bed, to the doctor in residence. Such experts mediate reality that otherwise would not be available to the subject.

How strong intersubjective confirmation is as a source of evidence has been shown in experiments of group psychology.[6] Under massive group pressure experimental subjects were prepared to accept even absurd interpretations of experienced perceptions and to give up their own initial opposing conviction. Thus, groups tend towards unified perceptions. The individual sees the world in the way that the group teaches. Also in the scientific search for truth, social confirmation de facto plays an important role, both in institutionally organized ('peer review') and informal ways (results that are potentially unwelcome in the researcher's social community are often suppressed).

(d) A fourth source of evidence needs to be mentioned. All experiencing and knowing are always also an *emotional event*.[7] Interpretations of something present or past or expectations aiming towards the future arouse feelings: hope, joy, repugnance, etc. If these are positive, plausibility is more likely to arise. If negative emotions are stirred up – for example, guilt feelings – repression processes can come into action; a troublesome insight fed by other sources of evidence is banished from the construct of reality.

[5] Cf. the corresponding rule noted under 'linguistic-pragmatic level' above.

[6] Cf. as early as 1955 already S. Asch, 'Opinions and Social Pressure', *Scientific American* 193 (1955): 31–35.

[7] See above (under 'pragmatic level') the rule of usefulness, which makes positive experiences possible.

That God should have acted and brought about salvation on a cross – in modern terms, on an electric chair – aroused disgust in antiquity. For this reason such a teaching was not plausible for many and did not come into consideration as a building block for *their* construction of reality (1 Cor. 1.23).

That God would bring in salvation in the near future awakened hope in those who suffered in the present and made this apocalyptic teaching plausible at least *for them*. Thus, for this group of people this teaching came into consideration as a building block for the construction of reality.

That the non-Jewish sympathizers, called *sebomenoi*, on the fringes of the synagogues should no longer be 'second-class' believers but fully valid members of a congregation without the cost of circumcision aroused positive feelings towards the Christian variant of monotheism and opened up this group of pagans on the edge of the synagogues for the Christian mission. This example illustrates once again the criterion of usefulness.

From a systematic point of view, this fourth point in the list of sources of evidence is a collecting tank for sundries, collecting everything *else* that awakens positive feelings, because the flowing of the first three sources of evidence also generates pleasant emotions – in many researchers, for example, enjoying the empirical source of evidence even stirs the emotion of happiness.

The role of emotions in the construction of reality ought not to be underestimated. The Greek Sceptics already knew that our perception is subjectively coloured by our current emotional state (Sextus Empiricus, *Phyrr.* 1.100-101) and that it never presents the thing-in-itself to us (1.124). Positive emotional experience as a source of evidence, however, could become dicey if millions of people, for example, began taking mood-enlivening psycho-pharmaceuticals such as 'Prozac'. Naive realists believe that such pharmaceuticals slip rose-coloured glasses between the rough ontic reality and the brain of the subject. For them, these patients still perceive ontic reality just as they did before, but now only bathed in pink colour and for this reason easier to bear. From a constructivist point of view, however, the Prozac phenomenon must be portrayed more dramatically. With prolonged use, the subject's construct of reality might be *restructured*, because from the emotional-experience source of evidence, other data now emerge. Now cognitive constructs might become plausible for Prozac consumers, about which earlier they would have shaken their heads.

In this way, their constructs of reality will lose part of their intersubjectivity, because there will be enough other people who do not take Prozac and consider these constructs as 'cognitive disorders' or even 'hallucinatory side effects'. Inversely, however, it would be also conceivable that a totalitarian regime might mix not only fluoride but also psycho-pharmaceuticals into the drinking water in order to bring the emotional state of the subjects into line, thereby to steer them in a certain direction and standardize their constructs of reality.

The scheme of four sources of evidence could easily fan out further and be placed in relation to more traditional concepts of criteria with which we decide what should be accepted as 'real' and what not; but this would not contribute anything essential. *Sensory perception*, for instance, could be differentiated further into *syntactic*, *semantic*, and *pragmatic* criteria, with which we distinguish what is 'real' from what is mere 'delusion'.[8] I name by way of example at least these touchstones. At least the last two, the semantic and pragmatic criteria, will later play a role in our discussion of the sensory perception of the Easter resurrection apparitions.

The *syntactic* criteria focus on the fact that we are more readily prepared to consider a perception to originate from a phenomenon external to us the more vivid this perception is, that is, (a) the brighter[9] and the more sharply defined a supposed object stands out from its environment, (b) the more richly varied its structure is (with respect to form, surface, colour, etc.), and (c) the more sense organs it appeals to (seeing, hearing, etc.). The brain considers it as improbable that quite different sensory systems – such as balance and sight – will commit converging errors. This is to say, if the reports of these two different sensory systems converge, if for instance both report 'rough seas', this fact will be readily integrated in our construct of reality.

In addition, a phenomenon will be accepted as real more easily if (d) it moves itself, (e) is capable of being located unambiguously in space, (f) if it appears to be three-dimensional and not just flat, and (g) if its size and form remain constant when the perspective of the observer changes.

Negatively put, these criteria mean the more dimly and indistinct a perception, the more unreal it appears ('my son, it is a strip of fog' and not the king of elves, as Goethe poetizes in his *Erlkönig* ballad). The brain does not always feel confident when it draws the borderline between that which it interprets as actual perception and correspondingly as 'real', and that which it categorizes as purely mental processes (mere imaginations, illusions, day dreams, memories, plans for the future). Therefore, it is not surprising that from culture to culture this borderline is drawn in different ways. What in one ethnic or historical space is accepted as 'real' without further ado ('observable' elves, nymphs, and other spirits of nature) counts self-evidently as sheer imagination in others.

[8] For overviews, see M. Stadler and P. Kruse, 'Über Wirklichkeitskriterien', in V. Riegas (ed.), *Zur Biologie der Kognition* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 133–58; also G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (1994) (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 285–87, 294.

[9] One can ask whether this also applies to the Easter apparitions – whatever they may have been. The question cannot be answered, because not until later strata of the New Testament is there talk about a dazzling light in the Easter apparitions (e.g. Acts 9.3; cf. also Mk 9.3; Mt. 28.3).

These rules (a–g) belong, like the following ones, to the principles of reality construction. In the long process of phylogenesis, in early ontogenesis, as well as on the basis of later experiences with its environment, our brain has acquired these principles of constructing reality as tools; they are subject to our will only in the smallest measure – if at all.

The *semantic* (h) and the *pragmatic* (i–j) criteria, with which we decide what is 'real' and what is not, are: perceptions are more readily considered as originating from external objects, circumstances, or events if (h) they can easily be assigned a significance ('this is a table', 'this is a carnival event'); if we (i) can have an *effect* on the supposed objects or events, for example if we can touch and move them, and if we (j) could *expect* them. This last criterion appears to be especially important. Vaudeville magicians are able to arouse almost any illusion of reality in their audience, if they have earlier built up a particular expectation. We see what we want to see and ignore what does not 'suit' us.

Often the following semantic criteria are also listed as subcategories of the first, empirical source of evidence.[10] However, in many cases they might just as well be classified as subcategories of the second, cognitive source of evidence, or of the fourth, emotional source of evidence. The following criteria (k + l) operate like this. Something will more readily be viewed as real, (k) the better it fits into an existing context of meaning (agreement with context), and (l) the more attractive it is (valence in the broadest sense).

In reference to (k), let us imagine the following. If I touch something – for example in a darkened hospital room after the electricity went off – and assign to it the significance 'this is a hospital gurney', I am dealing with a *proposition* that I test for *coherence* ('I am in a hospital room'). If the context had been 'I am in a funeral home', the proposition 'this is a hospital gurney' would have failed the coherency test, and the ascription of meaning would have had to be changed to 'this is a funeral stretcher'. Testing new propositions for coherence is one of the *cognitive* criteria related to the second source of evidence.

In reference to (l), let us imagine the following. If by contrast, God forbid, I were groping around in a darkened funeral home after the electricity went off, I could nevertheless ascribe to my tactile sensation the significance 'this is a hospital gurney', because I shrink back from the emotionally repulsive 'this is a funeral stretcher'. In this case, the criterion of attractiveness plays a role; I prefer what seems more attractive to me – or less repulsive, for that matter. The criterion of attractiveness is identical with the fourth, emotional source of evidence (accepting something more attractive as 'real' arouses less negative feelings) – and it refers to *propositions* that evoke emotions: It is not the touching of an *object* itself – iron rails and linen sheets – that is

[10] Cf., among others, Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 285–87, 294.

repulsive to me, but the ascription of meaning that follows, which consists of a *proposition*: 'Yikes! This is a funeral stretcher.'

The two 'pragmatic' criteria (i + j) could just the same be classified as subcategories not only of the first, empirical source, but also of the *coherency criterion* of the cognitive source of evidence. With respect to (i) – something is accepted as 'real' if we can have an effect on it – consider the following. The ascription of meaning 'this brown and furry looking heap is a live camel, not a mirage' fits with the empirically attained proposition 'if I poke this object, it moves'. With respect to (j) – something is accepted as 'real' if it could be expected – let us imagine the following. The statement 'there comes my bus' fits with another 'I have already been waiting ten minutes on the bus that takes me to the city centre.' Although I cannot yet see where this bus is going because it is still in the far distance, I am convinced that it is 'my' bus. Why? Not only because I have been expecting it, but also because I have been formulating in my head as additional knowledge that 'no other buses appear in the schedule that at this time go somewhere else'. Therefore, I accept the statement 'there comes my bus' into my present reality construction.

Most of these cases have to do with testing a new *proposition* for coherence with other propositions that already have been accepted, showing how much the four sources of evidence interact – and that it is therefore impossible to attribute criteria such as (i–l) to only one of them exclusively.

(4) Let us return to Stenger and Geißlinger's experiment in the Upper Palatine. In the night after the dowser's visit, the supervisory team secretly poured sweet-smelling liquid in the holes of the stakes that marked the underground streams. As a further manipulation a bubbling noise was started in the basement.

The night watchmen who had been selected by the teen group on the previous day set out on an inspection tour and discovered the liquid in the holes of the stakes. Their perception was moulded by a concept, which had been shaped beforehand by the assumed connection between dream activity and flowing water. They assumed that their sleeping co-campers were dreaming in the sleeping quarters; they smelled the sweet fragrance, heard the bubbling sound, and saw the liquid in the holes of the stakes above the underground streams of water. Combining all of these factors cognitively, they thus perceived that parallel to the dreaming activity of their co-campers, the water level of the streams under the sleeping quarters had *risen* up to the stake holes (although actually liquid slowly seeped away in the holes). In a second step, they constructed – in a formally correct deduction – that not only do underground streams of water intensify dreams, but dreams also activate streams of water. The night watchmen *tested* this construct *experimentally* by waking up their co-campers in the sleeping quarters. Then they checked outside. In fact, the liquid in the holes was receding. And the bubbling fell silent – by the hand of the supervisory team.

By this point at the latest, the first part of the new construct of reality was complete. The *axiomatic groundwork* had been laid down: *There is an empirically 'proved' connection between dream activities and phenomena of liquids*.

However, this axiomatic basis was not evident with the same intensity for all members of the group at first. There were also teens who had only *heard* of the events that had produced the evidence, that is, they had not themselves dreamed 'strangely' and had not themselves smelled the fragrance. For them, social confirmation by their peers became the main source of evidence. Unequal distribution of knowledge and the resulting emergence of a hierarchy of those in the know versus those who know less present a general characteristic of social organization. This also holds true for the church. This also held for the ancient Corinthians among whom teachers of wisdom, and especially those who spoke in tongues with direct 'contact from above', rated higher than others.

After the axiomatic foundation was laid, the bell was rung for the second phase of the construction of reality in the Upper Palatinate. I leave out further entertaining details. All axiomatic groundwork steers people's attention and energy into new trajectories. The axiom is not discussed any longer. It is presupposed as 'reality' and has become the basis for future acting. Behaviour is guided from now on by this new reality.

Indeed, the group overturned all previous plans for the camp and resolved to get involved in the local dream phenomena, to investigate them, and to experiment with them. Dream research was carried out in workgroups and other institutionalizations. If dreams could influence the level of liquids, is it not then possible to conceive that the powers of imagination contained in dreaming could become independent from the dream itself by materializing themselves in the nature of the Upper Palatinate? Is it then not also possible to search for the world of imagination, set free from the dream, in the natural world surrounding the camp? Nothing seemed to be impossible anymore. The bison seen during the night outing and the door without a house were phenomena that were by no means manipulated by the supervisory team, but perceptions of the teenagers, achievements of interpretation within the framework of the newly constructed social reality.

In other words, after the axiomatic groundwork of the context has been laid, its *unfolding* begins. Categories emerge, connections are deduced. The context is built up by cognitive constructing, which nevertheless remains dependent on experiences. All sensory perception, however, is now shaped by the axiomatic groundwork.

Inversely, these perceptions corroborate the groundwork. Each social context – be it psychoanalytical, theological, or oriented in some other direction – *confirms itself* in this way, as we said. The bison was perceived by virtue of the axiomatic groundwork, but at the same time it corroborated

and fortified the axiom. Once a contextual reality unfolds, a pulling effect originates against which not even the supervisory team during the nightly hike in the Upper Palatinate was entirely immune. The context produces the pattern for interpreting observations; what is 'observed' in turn strengthens the context.

In ancient Corinth the social context constructed by the Christian enthusiasts also confirmed itself. (a) This is what belonged to the axiomatic groundwork of their context: already at the time of baptism, Christians obtain participation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, their souls, endowed with the spirit of Christ in baptism and thus closely linked with the risen Christ, are saved and given immortality in this ritual. The enthusiasts take part in the risen Lord's heavenly reign already now.[11]

Consequentially, the Corinthians denied a future resurrection after death (1 Corinthians 15) – which did not mean though that they had no hope for the time after death. On the contrary, the physical bodies fade into death (1 Cor. 6.13a as a Corinthian slogan), while the centre of the 'self' endures: the soul, immortalized since baptism, is freed from the physical body in death. The basis of this concept was a dichotomous anthropology, which divided soul and body from each other and devalued the latter (cf. 1 Cor. 6.12-20).[12]

(b) With this axiomatic groundwork of the context, categories of perception were made available that enabled the Corinthians to experience certain psychological phenomena as effects of the spirit of Christ. Inversely, these pneumatic-charismatic experiences, especially speaking in tongues, confirmed the context and its axiom, because they demonstrated to the Corinthians that they, as charismatics, were most intimately associated with the risen Christ and thus partaking in his resurrection and power already in the present time.[13]

Not least of all, it also belongs to the self-authenticating dynamics of the context that its supporters confirm the reality of their context to each other (mutual social confirmation). In Corinth, this happened in somewhat chaotic, spiritually moved community gatherings (1 Corinthians 12–14). In today's church, it would be the weekly Sunday worship service. In psychoanalysis, it would be conventions of insiders. The examples are legion.

(5) Finally, *within* each social context grounded on and then developed from axioms, it becomes possible for the constructors to distinguish 'true'

[11] Cf. 1 Corinthians 15; 4.8.

[12] Views similar to the Corinthian enthusiasm are found in Eph. 2.5-6; 5.14; Col. 2.12-13; 3.1; Jn 5.24-25; 2 Tim. 2.18.

[13] It could be asked whether the axiomatic foundation generated a phenomenon such as speaking in tongues in the first place. The phenomenon 'glossolalia', which is prevalent in various cultures, could be examined from this constructivist point of view. For example, does it always belong to the construct of reality of those who speak in tongues that they believe they are in a special proximity to a higher, superhuman power?

from 'false' by looking at the sources of evidence that have been mentioned. The concept of truth implied in this process, however, is a concept of *subjective* truth (from an epistemological point of view),[14] which says nothing about the relationship of a proposition to ontic reality.

A proposition to be tested appears to be true to the constructors when it is free of self-contradiction (consistency) and, as a building block, fits into the constructed context without contradiction (coherence). To test it, the other propositions of the context are thus brought in, which earlier had already moved up to the rank of elements that are true. If a contradiction emerges in this test of coherence, the new proposition is by no means necessarily rejected. Theoretically also the contradictory old proposition, which up until now was considered reliable, could be discarded. The old statement is abandoned if the sources of evidence flow less strongly for it than for the new one.

Furthermore, the new proposition on trial asserts itself as true for the constructors if it repeatedly proves successful in sensory interaction with the world (empirical pragmatics), if it can be shared intersubjectively (consensus, linguistic pragmatics), if it is useful for one's life (utilitarian pragmatics), or if it evokes positive emotions on other grounds. The last three criteria (consensus, benefit, emotions) are, however, not conditions *sine quibus non*; they are not 'necessary conditions'. Having said this, often they do play a role anyway.

(6) The context – the reality that we construct and in which we organize the elements of our world – is not static, but changes constantly through the discovery of new connections and elements. The construction of reality 'can be understood as an ongoing process of producing meaning; . . . "Research" appears then as an ongoing process of differentiating milieus of meaning.'[15]

Such modification of a context is the rule. By contrast, *changing* the context for another is rare. If within a context incompatibilities surface because of new sensory data propositions – a classical example from theology: Where was God in Auschwitz? – even so, often the context together with its axiom is not rejected in favour of a completely new milieu of meaning, but the old context is further enriched and differentiated. New meaning is produced *within* the old context. This holds also for contexts of the natural sciences. Only if even the most complicated and sophisticated differentiations can no longer eliminate incompatibilities and contradictions does the call for a paradigm shift become unmistakeable. Not until then is a context given up in favour of another. With a paradigm shift the axiom of the old context proves to be false *in light of the newly constructed context*.

[14] See chapter II, section 2.2.3 above.

[15] Horst Stenger and Hans Geißlinger, 'Die Transformation sozialer Realität: Ein Beitrag zur empirischen Wissensoziologie', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 43 (1991): 247–70, here 269.

Thus, there are two different paths to falsification. What cannot be fitted into a context by the criteria mentioned above drops out as false. However, even what in this context proved to be *true* might possibly be falsified. How? Such falsification could happen when we exchange the paradigm.

Constructed Reality

Summary of the model

Mental, subjective context



Social, objective context

(a) = an individual acquires the social context in a process of socialization (routinized production of meaning).

(b) = objectivization = intersubjectivization.

Social context = intersubjectively shared milieu of meaning = social reality.

Every social context is based on an *axiomatic groundwork*, which has been laid by means of cognitive construction and accepted as evident.

Cognitive construction, that is, production of meaning, is achieved by linking together previously unconnected units of knowledge that have become relevant.

Such a construction is accepted if it is evident, that is, if as many sources of evidence as possible are flowing.

Phase after the axiomatic groundwork of the social context has been laid

- The *interest* and the *actions* of the group *orient themselves anew*. Both are guided by the new reality.
- The new context *unfolds*: On the basis of the axiom new connections are derived and categories are formed.

This unfolding can happen successfully only if at least the first two of the four sources of evidence continue to flow. That is, the unfolding of the context rests not only on

- *cognitive construction*, but also on
- *experiences and sensory perceptions*, which are shaped by the axiomatic basis;

possibly also on

- *social confirmation* and on
- *positive emotional experience.*

Thus being grounded on evidence, constructions that create reality are by no means 'arbitrary' or 'fictive' for those who live in this context.

This sort of unfolding of the context, pushed ahead by the four sources of evidence, leads to the *self-confirmation* of the context.

Sources of evidence

A proposition becomes evident and thus is accepted because four major sources of evidence are flowing. The impression that things behave in the way the proposition asserts (evidence) arises through:

(a) *Cognitive construction*

When looking at (at least) two units of knowledge,

coincidence or
congruence

might be observed. As a result, the two elements of knowledge are connected by establishing, for example, a causal, modal, or conditional nexus between them, or by drawing a conclusion from analogy.

Evidence arises when, in addition, the newly achieved proposition fulfils as many of the norms of

consistency,
coherence,
comprehensiveness, and
aesthetics ('ideal of succinctness')

as possible (see above at the beginning of chapter V).

(b) Empirical interaction with the external world:

Sensory perception/experience is

- reliant upon concept-dependent categories of perception previously made available;
- especially relevant,
  - if it can be repeated,
  - if it is widely spread (intersubjectivity; possibly every individual can be exposed to it), and
  - if an institutional frame has been created for it (intersubjectivity).

(c) *Social (intersubjective) confirmation*,

for example, by experts; *consensus* with others.

(d) Other types of positive *emotional experiencing*. Positive feelings are aroused not only by the flow of the first three sources of evidence (a–c), but also by other experiences, for example by witnessing the *pragmatic* benefit of a proposition in one's life (see the beginning of chapter V as well as the examples above).

Chapter VI

Implications for Theological Discourse

Before we apply the model heuristically to early Christian examples, it should be asked what the constructivist approach delivers for theological discussion in principle. I have chosen somewhat 'mischievously' the Corinthian enthusiasts as an introductory example, because even Paul – and his interpreters – have been convinced that the Corinthian design of reality was merely 'constructed' and did not represent ontic reality. On this point Paul, his interpreters, and constructivist thinkers are in agreement. The situation becomes critical, however, when constructivists in interdisciplinary dialogue tell us theologians that *all* theological designs of reality portray a constructed reality. From a constructivist perspective, all theologies, but also all scientific, all everyday-life, or all psychoanalytic designs, are constructed social contexts of meaning, incapable of representing ontic reality.

Nonetheless, the constructivist query of theology is much less threatening for the participants in theocentrically oriented social contexts than this may appear at first glance.

1 On the Non-Absolute Character of Theological Speech

Not only have unbelievers always known about the character of theology as a construction, believers have also sensed something of it whenever they have realized how much the various theological concepts differ – already in the New Testament. Hence, believers have also often considered that these doctrinal concepts never reproduce God's ontic reality entirely.

In the history of doctrine, it sounded even more self-critical – at least in some cases – when theologians realized that their propositions never can capture the sovereign God (otherwise this God would not be sovereign), that they never can make their formulations without reservation, knowing deep down in their hearts that responsible theological words can be only spoken in doxological language, in the second-person style of prayer language (like Augustine in his *Confessions*), not in the form of third-person propositions.

But even for the form of second-person address it held true: 'Never be rash with your mouth . . . to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few . . . where there are many words, one hears a fool' (Ecc. 5.2-3). The sovereignty of God relegates the

believer's talk into humility. 'No human has power over the wind to restrain the wind' (8.8).[1]

The constructivist view points in the same direction as the Pauline theology of the cross – even though it goes beyond the latter. Paul knew about the relativity of theology as discourse under the cross. That is, for him theological discourse could never claim to be absolute; it could only be offered 'in fear and trembling' (1 Cor. 2.3) as something fragmentary, broken up into letters, which were bound up with their situations.

To mention only one example, it was a part of Paul's renunciation of elaborate dogmatics that he set several soteriological concepts side by side in a relatively unconnected way. He expounded soteriology into differing linguistic horizons: in a *baptismal participatory language* horizon (dying with and rising with Christ [Romans 6, see chapter VII, section 3 below]); in a *forensic* horizon (justification); in a *cultic* horizon (Christ's death as an offering that initiates a covenant [1 Cor. 11.25 taken over from Exodus 24; in addition Christ as the locus of atonement and mediator between God and humanity [Rom. 3.25 taken over from Leviticus 16]); in a non-cultic horizon of *vicarious representation*, *substitution* (Isaiah 53; all Pauline ὑπέρ statements most probably belong here and not in a cultic context; see below); in an *economic-legal* horizon (ransom: 1 Cor. 6.20; 7.23); and in a *political* horizon (reconciliation: Rom. 5.11; 2 Cor. 5.18-19). Setting categories ('currencies') side by side does not mean that they might not be compatible with each other; currencies can be interchanged. But Paul's repeated attempts to approach the soteriological topic from different linguistic directions shows that he did not lay claim to having grasped the *mysterion* of God in any ultimately valid way.

For Paul, the *form* of Christian proclamation has to be in conformity with the central *content* of the gospel – that is, with a crucified Christ (ἐσταυρωμένος). In other words, the form of this proclamation has to be moulded by this cross, characterized by tentativeness and weakness (ἀσθένεια). 'Not that I have already attained it, but I pursue it' (Phil. 3.12).[2] For Paul, theology on the basis of the λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ, the 'word of the cross' (1 Corinthians 1-2), operates under the judging power of a sovereign divine subject, who, as the object of Christian theology, again and again calls this theology

[1] Cf. also, e.g., Ecc. 8.17: 'Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really find it out.' 'As you do not know the path of the wind . . . , so you do not know the work of God, the Maker of all things' (11.5). 'For who has stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and to hear his word?' (Jer. 23.18). 'Do you have a monopoly on wisdom?' (Job 15.8). Similarly Isa. 40.13 LXX; Rom. 11.34.

[2] In the micro-context of Philippians 3, this statement refers to becoming perfect in the eschaton (v. 11 resurrection); in the macro-context of Pauline theology it also refers to the need for humbleness in the theological cognitive process. For Paul, *all* aspects of Christian existence are under the eschatological proviso; we are 'not yet' seeing God clearly, we are 'not yet' perfected, 'not yet' risen to glory (1 Cor. 4.8), etc.

into question; otherwise it would not remain meaningful to speak about a sovereign God incapable of being domesticated – incapable of being captured by any theology. Responsible theology needs to allow God the sovereign freedom possibly to be different from the way it defines God.[3]

At least latently, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have always recognized that with their propositions about God they only construct *models* of God without being able to lay claim to have abstracted from ontic reality a *similar representation*. Over the threshold of the three monotheistic religions hangs the explicit prohibition of an image.

Like constructivism, all three suppose that an ontic reality exists. But they do not leave it at this minimal statement; rather they add that one sovereign God also belongs to this ontic reality. But then they immediately pull on the reins again by emphasizing that this God ultimately cannot be *known* or *comprehended*. Yahweh, the I-am-who-I-am, is revealed to Moses as the one who withdraws. Accordingly, for monotheism God cannot be contained in cultic images. On the contrary, a *book* makes God accessible while at the same time it keeps God at a distance. The medium of writing per se cannot become a cultic image. As a mark of reference, the book is released from the suspicion of likeness and points away from itself. Having great respect for the linguistic sign takes the place of idolatry. In the sanctuary, the canonical scroll stands where an image would be expected.[4]

The step carried out in monotheism from cultic image to writing leaves the one God in the inaccessible distance and serves as a warning to the heirs of the monotheistic tradition not to allow the linguistic statement itself to become once again an idol and hence to become the letter that kills (cf. 2 Cor. 3.6), which nevertheless often happens in ecclesiastical praxis.

Finally, when the Book of Genesis (1.26) calls human beings themselves images of the creator, it directs them in their search for an appropriate language about God back to just themselves (and to their and God's capability to be in a relation to each other). By doing so, Genesis refrains from sufficiently describing God, because God, being external to human beings, is precisely not 'like' them. When God is spoken about, simultaneously this God withdraws. Whenever theologians fancy that they have a solid formula in hand, the image that they presume to be God's likeness crumbles. Monotheism became conscious of this again and again – even though legion of its spokespersons were (and are) less modest.

[3] On Paul's cross-theological insight on the limits of theological discourse, see further P. Lampe, 'Theological Wisdom and the Word about the Cross', *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 117–31, esp. 122–25.

[4] In spite of this, parts of Christianity used the image category anyway, defining Christ as the true image of God (e.g. 2 Cor. 4.4, also Jn 14.9). But this category interestingly enough implied that this Christ is *Logos*, a word (John 1) the echo of which meets us again only as writing or as a word proclaimed by human beings (1 Cor. 1.18).

2 Human Interaction with a Cognitive Model of God?

Like dogmatists confidently affirming that their theology approaches the ontic reality of God, many natural scientists of the past have argued that their picture of the world draws at least near to ontic reality in a verifiable way. From a constructivist point of view, however, *both* must keep in mind that this allegedly 'approaching' character of their constructs remains an unsupported speculation, a hope, hence a faith (see chapter II, section 1.5 above). That this sober insight is to be taken to heart by *all* constructors of reality mitigates the steeliness of the constructivist query to theology. However, before we discuss the 'mitigation' (in chapter VI, section 3), we have to endure for a while the discomfort of the constructivist query.

If for constructivists dealing with a human 'you' and with one's own 'self' is always only dealing with a constructed model (see chapter III, section 3 above), from a constructivist point of view this holds even more for relationships of humans with God. The human subject works with a cognitive model of God when dealing with God, without being able to know the ontic reality of God. To be sure, those who define themselves in their 'world of experience' as standing in a relationship with God are able to say a lot about the reality of God – they are then, for example, theologians. But for constructivists, this theologically formulated reality is constructed reality, *without* them affirming thereby that God has no ontic reality! Constructivists neither assert this nor the opposite. Atheism on the other hand is likewise a constructed reality and as such then – in the absence of better ontological quality – nothing other than a devout confession of a faith.

For the constructivist, as we have said, an ontic reality exists without a doubt and in the same way so does the possibility of experiencing it, because it constantly sets up barriers against our actions. But this world of objective resistances, among which we act, is inaccessible and indescribable (see chapter III above). This means it is also *unknowable* as divided into an ontic reality of God on the one hand and an ontic reality of the created world on the other. This differentiation is already a theologically constructed reality, inasmuch as *every* differentiation into distinct elements is a cognitive construction of reality. By the use of differentiations humans create their world and with it everything that they call 'reality' and that constitutes their world of experience. From a constructivist point of view, no theology of revelation will be able to change this; in fact, every dogmatic prolegomenon presenting a theology of revelation will itself always be only constructed reality.[5] This does not mean that the ontic *could* not in fact be differentiated into God

[5] Incidentally this also holds true for every epistemology that takes its starting point in the human mental capacity – including constructivist epistemology. No door is opened to human beings to exit from this dilemma. See further at the end of chapter VI.

on the one hand and creation on the other. Only there is in principle no cognitive entrance to an ontic reality that is possibly so structured, not even a cognitive entrance by means of the clever move of a theology of revelation.

From a constructivist perspective, a theology of revelation cannot get around the fact that every theologically described reality is a construct. But – again – this is not because the constructivist contests in principle that there could be something like a self-revelation of God in ontic reality. For the constructivist, such negative or positive statements about ontic reality are impossible and therefore unfit for becoming the starting point for an epistemology.

Should theology thus give up the concept of revelation and the idea – supported not by certainty but by hope – that God, the object of knowledge, as an active subject makes it possible for humans to cognize God's self? By no means. The concept of revelation as a root element of theological construction of reality led to the canonization of a corpus of scriptures in which (from the point of view of believers) God's self-revelation is laid down, a self-revelation that took place in history. With such a canon, theology accepted for itself a set of propositions as true, by which all other propositions of any theological construct of reality need to be measured in a test of coherence. Theology put a foundation under its own system. From an epistemological point of view, this foundation with its axiomatic propositions admittedly contributes nothing to the cognition of the indeterminate relationship between constructed reality (*Wirklichkeit*) and ontic reality (*Realität*). However, *within* the world of the theocentric construct of reality, it increases the confidence in this construction: The concept of revelation stabilizes the *Lebenswelt* of the theocentric context.

Certainly, the canonical set of propositions grew as a book over centuries flowing from the pens of many human authors, and for this reason it is not free of contradictions. However, this is a kettle of fish that does not need to be examined again at this point. The problem has burdened theology for millennia with hermeneutical homework. Just as a set of unalterable sense data propositions can never be the basis for a scientific system – this was the splendid dream of logical empiricism in the twentieth century that collapsed (see chapter II, section 1.6 above) – just as little is a set of unalterable canonical propositions the basis for theology. The statements of canonical scripture must always be formulated anew, weighed against one another, and adjusted – in hermeneutical wrestling with the text and with one's own time. Nevertheless, in spite of this variance, this can be held onto: without the canon, which is closed as far as its size is concerned, and without the concept of revelation that supports it, arbitrariness in the process of construction would be going overboard.

3 Ontological Equality of Diverse Designs of Reality as a Prerequisite for Intercontextual Dialogue and Competition

To sum up, in a constructivist perspective, every theology always represents only a constructed reality without the constructivist maintaining therefore that there is no God in ontic reality. Neither this nor the opposite proposition about ontic reality is possible from a constructivist point of view. But this also means that on the ontological level a constructed reality in which God appears is in no way inferior to one that does not include a god. The cognitive subject *has to* construct reality in order to be able to live and to survive. However, none of the constructors has the right to look down at another, claiming that his or her knowledge is ontologically of a higher value, nearer to ontic reality. Although often put into practice, this would be a fundamental error from a constructivist point of view. From an ontological perspective, all constructors, whether they are theologians, scientists, or psychoanalysts, are sitting in the same boat. *On the ontological level* no one has a head start with his or her knowledge over another. All of them are groping in the dark, because direct access to ontic reality is not open to any human being. This also means that the commonly accepted difference in status between the knowledge of the natural sciences and theologically formulated knowledge is not to be found *on the ontological level*. Scientific knowledge also represents constructed reality; only naive realists assume that it reproduces ontic reality. Sociology of knowledge speaks of the 'fabrication of knowledge' in the laboratories of the natural sciences in which society is condensed.[6] But even if we did not accept this radical point of view, it would remain that the world described by physics is not identical with ontic reality.

> All concepts of physics have originated from the human mind and rest on human conceptions and agreements, which have been laboriously developed over centuries or even millennia. They presuppose other concepts from which they were derived, or they are positings that cannot be explained further . . . such as the concepts of 'mass,' 'power,' or 'energy.' Physics makes use of the language of mathematics, which likewise is not without presuppositions, but rests on . . . axioms.[7]

What we call 'natural laws' are proved by means of experiments that presuppose measuring apparatuses; these in turn presuppose particular theories and work only under limited conditions. 'Beyond these presuppositions there are no natural laws.'[8]

[6] See chapter IV above.

[7] G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (1994) (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 323.

[8] Ibid.

In *Nature*, the critical realists K. Gottfried and K. G. Wilson offered a counter-argument to the constructivist sociology of knowledge critique of the natural sciences to the effect that, on the basis of the detected natural laws, the natural sciences have made accurate prognoses possible, which shows their 'objective grip on reality'.[9] We admire, for instance, that the observed background radiation of the cosmos fits almost perfectly with Max Planck's law of radiation (less than 0.1 per cent deviation) even though these observations were not made until much later. But would we have observed the same phenomenon of 'background radiation' if our theoretical system, to which Planck and many others contributed, had been something else? A language of observation independent of theory does not exist, as we saw in the discussion with logical empiricism. The circular structure is not brushed off the table with the reference to accurate prognostics. The problem lies deeper. Every context of knowledge confirms itself (see above), including the one that is empirically underpinned.

Perhaps the realist might want to object that the prognoses of the natural sciences, such as of meteorology, become increasingly *better*, thus demonstrating that we are increasingly drawing closer cognitively to ontic reality, until at least theoretically there will be no gap anymore. But is the latter conclusion obvious? Refined 'natural laws' that we formulate during our ongoing interaction with the external world, and correspondingly better prognoses, indicate a higher degree of viability of our constructed reality. Consider this allegory. Our epistemological situation is comparable to us moving around in an unknown dark attic, that is, in the ontic reality, bumping our knees and head again and again. Gradually our brain makes up an image of this room although our sole sensual perception is the sense of touch. When we then learn to move around in this room *better* with fewer and fewer bruises, this means that our mental image of the room is getting more viable. But a very high degree of viability does not guarantee that this image is 'objective' in the sense that it faithfully reflects the ontic reality of the room. We can be never sure that our brain's image of the room, regardless of its degree of viability, actually corresponds to what the room will look like when we turn on the light. In *any* case, there will be surprises when the light is switched on. What we may viably have identified as a sofa in the dark could in fact be a hibernating bear! The step from a viable construct to a faithful reflection of ontic reality is *not a quantitative* one, it is a qualitative leap: it is from just using our sense of touch to switching the light on and seeing. Non-allegorically speaking, it is from leaving our limited human existence and becoming a god who enjoys the god's eye view of the Archimedian point.

'Physics may be . . . the most critical or the most universal description of the phenomena of [the constructed] reality [*Wirklichkeit*], but it does not exceed

[9] K. Gottfried and K. G. Wilson, 'Science as a Cultural Construct', *Nature* 386, 10 (April 1997): 545–47, quotation p. 547.

[the constructed] reality.'[10] It does not open the gate to ontic reality [*Realität*], but remains bound to the conditions of constructed reality. Models such as those of the atom explain many physical and chemical phenomena *in our reality*, such as the phenomenon of an electrical charge. As building stones, they thus fit well into the reality constructed by us and, making prognoses possible, they enjoy a high practical value in our world of experience. Nothing less, and nothing more. Analogously the same could be said of theological designs, which in our world of experience might demonstrate a high practical value, be it for instance by creating meaning (of life), being comforting or socially integrating, or motivating altruistic behaviour.

> If there is no distinction in status between the natural sciences and theological knowledge *on the ontological level*, there is on the social level, for example. In secular society the clergy has been dethroned – which was actually good for them – by the natural scientists. Scientific knowledge, which within its constructed context (but *only* within) is capable of being tested in a rigorous and formalized way, rightly has gained a high standing. A higher *ontological* quality of the knowledge of the natural sciences, however, does not arise from this.
>
> What unites different academic disciplines over and above their ontological equality (they all grope in the dark in respect to the distance of their constructs from ontic reality) are their respective endeavours to erect a building of propositions that with regard to logical structure and sense data statements (measurements, observations in nature, in society, about human beings, about historical sources of a literary or archaeological nature, etc.) exhibits a maximum degree of coherence and plausibility. Such a building of propositions can always be criticized only *within* the limits of constructed reality, by confronting it with new propositions that appear more plausible to us, with new intersubjectively accepted sense data statements and with new logical inferences.[11]

What applies to theology or natural sciences from a constructivist perspective also holds inevitably for psychoanalysis, for example. For inveterate psychoanalysts every constructivist relativizing of depth psychology as a context that authenticates itself must be a horror. But such a critique is not so devastating as it at first seems, because the constructivist asserts that *all* social milieus of meaning that create reality are such self-authenticating contexts – the theological, the psychoanalytical as well as the natural scientific ones. Therefore, the critique is not devastating at all. Human beings cannot get on without constructed social realities if they want to live. Metaphorically spoken, a cardiologist does not cease to have a circulatory system. And non-metaphorically expressed, a theologian who works with a constructivist epistemology does not for this reason cease sincerely to believe in God and

[10] Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit*, 324.

[11] On the obsolete, often sharply demarcated dichotomy between the humanities and natural sciences, see further in chapter IX.

to attend church, convinced and carried by his or her theocentric reality. Just as little do neurobiological brain researchers cease to think in terms of the everyday world. We cannot and ought not to slip off our human skin. The meta-level of constructivist epistemology does not lead to an exodus out of the *conditio humana*, which is dependent on the construction of intersubjective reality. In other words, humans cannot live by constructivist epistemology alone. It can only help them ascertain the epistemological fundamentals of their knowing and doing.

The result of the constructivist perspective is thus not so much that theological designs of reality present a constructed reality – non-believers have advocated this truism for a long time – but that a theological design of reality *from an ontological point of view* is in no way inferior to other designs of reality, even to those of the natural sciences. All of us are in the same boat. This is the insight.

Theologians sit in this boat, for example, beside theoretical physicists with their big bang, string and other creative theories. Some cosmologists in the field of physics presume the existence of several universes, which might be connectable by 'tunnels'; they are inspired by the insight of quantum mechanics that particles do not occupy a defined location, but that in proximity to a barrier they also possess a probability of being located on the other side of the barrier and thus are able to 'tunnel through' barriers. Physicists calculate enormous amounts of energy that would be necessary for such tunnelling. At the big bang, did our universe tunnel its way out of nothing? Do we live in several universes at the same time? Or do we live in a four-dimensional 'bubble' within a universe of ten or more dimensions?[12]

Our brain's notion of a three-dimensional space is most probably deficient – at least in view of the results of quantum mechanics. In evolution, this notion developed as a cerebral programme to organize and process sensory stimuli into the perception of a hunting and gathering mammal. Only with difficulty have we grown accustomed in the last century no longer to consider time and space as separated spheres, but to join them in a four-dimensional, curved space-time. But nothing guarantees that the ontic reality of our universe is structured in four dimensions, if the epistemological conclusions above are taken seriously (see chapters II–III above). An old thought of the Greek Sceptics is called to mind: 'Possessing only the five senses, we note only those properties of an apple that we can perceive, while other properties . . . perhaps exist' (Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrr*. 1.97). Is the 'bubble' referred to above primarily a noetic bubble?

[12] For the latter, cf., e.g., the theoretical physicist at Harvard Lisa Randall, *Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions* (New York: Ecco, 2005); L. Randall and R. Sundrum, 'A Large Mass Hierarchy from a Small Extra Dimension', *Physical Review Letters* 83 (1999): 3370–73.

Modern physicists who create models such as these are anything but arbitrarily speculating minds. In rigorously controlled computations, they draw conclusions from already attained bodies of knowledge. However, in spite of the entirely different premises, methods, and results, their models somewhat resemble the cosmological construction works that philosophy and theology produced on a large scale in their history.

It is even possible to detect an (inversely proportionate) similarity between quantum mechanics and the theological concept of revelation. They both have in common that the borderline between the object and the subject of cognition is not clearly defined, but seems to be blurred. In quantum mechanics, we can formulate that my observation influences the properties of the object of cognition. That is, through my observation I partly move to the side of the object of cognition. Inversely, according to the theological concept of God's self-revelation, the object of cognition does not guide my cognitive process in a passive way (as other objects do), but steers it as an active subject, thus partly moving to the side of the subject of cognition. When God is perceived, I do not relate to God as a mere object, but God as a subject actively relates to me so that I, as the perceiving subject, become an object at the same time (see, for example, 1 Cor. 8.1-3).

If the paradisial cognitive gate to ontic reality is closed to us mortals, and the constructivist approach places the various constructors as equals on the same ontological level, this does not mean that all constructors with their propositions about reality are a priori 'right' and proclaim 'truth' in each case. The equality has nothing to do with postmodern 'whateverism' that celebrates indifference in the way of 'it does not matter what you think; everything and nothing can be true anyway'. The equality only implies that on the stage of those who are on equal terms, a fair *competition* can begin about what should be accounted as 'true' – competition, and also dialogue that checks to what extent different constructs are compatible with each other. Often competition between different constructs is out of the picture and only a side-by-side relationship is possible (as in the cases of quantum mechanics vs theology vs zoology, etc.). But then we need to make sure that these different milieus of meaning indeed fit without contradictions into the one building of our constructed lifeworld.

Equality on the ontological level means that on the stage of the competition nobody can brag any longer that his or her construct of reality is of higher ontological value, thus better representing ontic reality, so that the competition with other systems is already decided a priori and a dialogue with others is not worthwhile. What should be accounted as 'true' or 'false' needs to be decided over the course of the competition – *apart* from the ontological question of proximity or distance to ontic reality. Chapter VIII (also the end of chapter IX) will discuss according to

which rules such a contest ought to be conducted, and according to which criteria individuals can make decisions for themselves.

The equality creates a platform for dialogue – one boat, and not many riding the waves out of earshot from each other. Hence, the situation for the representatives of the Christian design of reality has improved. Constructivism serves theology apologetically – even without intending this. The improvement consists of the fact that, in the competitive dialogue, a theocentric construct of reality is placed on the same ontological level as the other constructs.

All actors on the stage should use the chance for increased and ameliorated interdisciplinary dialogue provided by constructivism, especially in those academic settings in which dialogue often ends at the barriers between disciplines. The constructivist approach ensures that theology – as the advocate of updated Christian tradition, that is, of past reality constructs at the root of our Western culture – remains communicable in secular societies. Admittedly this is an apologetic concern. But there is nothing wrong with that. The dwindling of Christian influence in Western societies does not hold true for other regions of the world where Christianity is growing faster than ever before; but the Western churches will soon face a situation similar to that of the apologists of the second century CE. Back then, teachers such as Justinus combined Middle Platonism with Christianity in order to be able to communicate in a pagan environment. Today other partners are available.

Of course, the theoretical design presented here has no 'objective' force and is therefore nothing but an invitation to dialogue, because the common platform for dialogue built on the meta-level of constructivist epistemology can claim 'objectivity' only in so far as it is carried – again – by intersubjective consent; nothing more. Here objectivity is also not based on a special relation to ontic reality. For what reason?

If we climb, with constructivist binoculars in hand, onto a second meta-level, then constructivist epistemology itself 'only' is (a) a self-confirming context. Whoever looks through these binoculars will suddenly see constructors at work everywhere. The constructivist-epistemological context of the first meta-level also confirms itself. It is itself an example illustrating its own thesis.

(b) Furthermore, in the view through binoculars from the second meta-level, the thesis that theologically, psychoanalytically, or scientifically formulated realities are 'only' constructions (= first meta-level) is itself 'only' a constructed reality (= second meta-level); nothing can be said about its relation to ontic reality. This means that the foundational constructivist thesis – 'reality is a construct of the brain' – is itself a second-degree construct of reality, which does not rest on a rock of 'absolute truth' either. Constructivism cannot spare itself from this objection, which is of its own

making. Is there an exit from the dilemma? On a third meta-level, we could retort to this objection that it is a construct as well. Whoever has the energy can repeat the same round on a fourth meta-level, ad infinitum. Once more we do not escape the *conditio humana.* There is no exit as long as we are humans.

Chapter VII

Application of the Model to Early Christian Examples: The New Reality of the Early Christians

1 The Resurrection of Jesus

Early Christianity lived by countless creations of meaning branching from the Jewish monotheistic tree, just as it drew its life from what Jesus of Nazareth contributed to this Judaism. Starting from the monotheistic axiom of Yahwistic religion, we could trace the multifarious development of the Israelite-Jewish social context (= context of meaning). We could describe Jesus' creations of meaning, which produced a new social context for his adherents, as an example of the manifold branches of the ancient Jewish context of meaning. However, at this point in our deliberations, we will not go into these pre-Easter prerequisites of early Christianity;[1] rather we want to study what initiated the post-Easter, earliest Christian special form of Judaism and how its axiom can be described.

1.1 The axiom of the early Christian context

If we consider Easter as the birth of Christianity, that is, the discourse about the resurrection of Jesus by God as the starting point of the specifically early Christian design of reality, then the axiomatic foundation of the new early Christian social context of meaning can be formulated as

(God), who raised Jesus from the dead.

So ran the early Christian axiom in its oldest formulation available to us, as it is laid down in the pre-Pauline formula in Rom. 4.24; 8.11; Gal. 1.1.[2] This one-part, participial formula declared: God's self as creator acted in the resurrection of Jesus. The human Jesus was gifted with new personal existence out of death.

[1] Not until the conclusion of this chapter (section 6) will the historical Jesus' proclamation be focused on by means of an example.

[2] Cf. Col. 2.12; 2 Cor. 4.14; Acts 13.33; 17.31; Heb. 13.20.

With 'personal existence' we make no statement about the character of the body of the risen Jesus (a 'spiritual body', a resuscitated corpse or something similar?). With 'new personal existence' it is noted only that, for the first Christians, the risen Jesus was an active subject who was able to act, to whom they could relate as a counterpart, and whom they addressed as present (prayer; the Aramaic *maranatha*[3] cry). The implied concept of 'person', consequently, does not aim at the internal structure of this acting subject ('spiritual body' or something similar), but at his capacity of being in external relationships. The Greek *prosopon* ('person') focuses on the side of the subject that turns to me, the subject's face, with which I interact, which perceives me, which expresses itself face to face with me, acts, and reacts – or is replaced by a mask. Emphasis is placed, therefore, on this other one's active relating to me and not only on a passive relation in the fashion of how figures of the past such as Aristotle, Augustine, or Francis of Assisi become accessible to me when I let myself be influenced by their teaching or the example of their lives. In the Christophanies (1 Cor. 15.5-8), the risen one *actively* entered into relationships; this is how early Christians defined their reality.

At this early stage of early Christian tradition, nothing was yet said about the nature of the resurrection body. Not until later did early Christians think they should know more about specifics, telling stories, for example, about traces of the crucifixion on Jesus' resurrection body (Jn 20.27) and about an empty tomb (Mark 16), as well as saying that the risen one possessed flesh and bones and ate broiled fish (Lk. 24.39-43). During the later unfolding of the early Christian context of meaning, various cognitive constructors dedicated themselves to the problem of how to conceive of a resurrection body – with varying results. Paul, the earliest, denied in 1 Corinthians that it had to do with a simple resuscitation of a corpse with flesh and blood. 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (15.50). According to Paul, there is both the continuity that '*we*' will be brought through death[4] and the breaking off of the old, like a brown seed of grain sunk in the ground disintegrates in order to change into a colourful branched plant (1 Cor. 15.35ff.).[5] For

3 'Our Lord, come!' (1 Cor. 16.22).

4 Paul prefers plain personal pronouns in order to express continuity between earthly existence and resurrection existence (e.g. 2 Cor. 5.1-3).

5 It would be misunderstanding Paul to look for the continuity in a subsector of the human being, in an immortal soul for instance. Paul thinks more holistically in the footsteps of Jewish anthropology, which fits surprisingly well with modern anthropology. This also perceives of the human being in a holistic perspective as a psychosomatic *unity*: We are not souls planted in a body, but animated, that is, enlivened bodies, which have become conscious of themselves. Nothing in us, not even a demarcated inner part, is immortal per se. Everything dies. Discontinuity. For Paul a qualitative leap is required, a new creative intervention, so that there can be continuity of life, the *continuity* of a human being beyond death.

Paul, resurrection did not mean restitution of the pre-mortal being.[6] And if he were to be asked whether the tomb not far from Golgotha in Jerusalem was empty after Easter – he never expressed himself on this, because it was not an important question for him – then he might have been able to concede that, speaking in systematic terms, an empty tomb was not a necessary condition for the Easter faith. But perhaps he would not have drawn this conclusion – although it would have been coherent with his deliberations about Jesus' rising – and he might have rather preferred the coherence with traditional statements like Daniel 12, according to which at the resurrection the graves are empty.[7] We do not know. In systematic terms at any rate, if the Pauline concept is drawn out, God's rising act – an act of creating anew – is not dependent on the matter of the old body. Material continuity does not even ensure the continuity of a human being during the lifetime before death, since my organism of today no longer contains any molecules from the body that once attended first grade in elementary school. Accordingly, for Paul, an empirical clue for the Easter faith was not to be found in the graveyard, but in the six visionary experiences of early Christians reported in 1 Corinthians 15.[8] It is thus not surprising that not until late, around four decades after the death of the Nazarene, do we discover the tradition of an empty tomb of Jesus in literary form.[9]

To go back to the pre-Pauline formula, with the simple name 'Jesus' the text picked up the memory of the earthly Jesus; Christological titles are absent. The interest of the formula was theologically oriented and not Christologically. The participial phrase expressed primarily something about God – and this in a praising acclamation addressed *to* God: praise of God in worship probably was the original '*Sitz im Leben*' of the formula, because

[6] 1 Cor. 15.37, 50; similarly 2 Baruch 49.2; 51. Rather, death 'unclothes' the human being from the physical-psychic conditions of the pre-mortal human (2 Cor. 5.3a, participle in adversative sense). Even those Christians who still are alive at the *parousia*, who thus do not need any resurrection, will not be carried away into heaven just as they are, but will be reshaped (1 Cor. 15.51, 52c, 53-54; also 2 Cor. 5.4 emphasizes the transformation of those who are still living, which consists of 'putting on' something new, prepared 'in heaven', while what is old will 'be *swallowed up*': 5.1-2, 4. The more naive pre-Pauline prophetic saying in 1 Thess. 4.17 does not yet deliberate in this direction). A *new* 'body' 'dominated by God's spirit', and far surpassing the discarded 'earthly body' (1 Cor. 15.35ff., 44), stands prepared 'in heaven' for those who are transformed and those who are resurrected (2 Cor. 5.1-2). The 'earthly body' awaits nothing but discontinuity: 2 Cor. 5.6, 8.

[7] Of course, the Jewish tradition in itself was not consistent. It is possible also to find the idea that a person dwells in heaven although the grave is occupied. According to *Test. Job* 39-40, Job's children are buried beneath a house, and nevertheless Job claims that his children are in heaven.

[8] On the Pauline concept, see further P. Lampe, 'Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body', in T. Peters, R. J. Russell, and M. Welker (eds), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2002), 103–14.

[9] At the present time, Frank Conrads is devoting himself to the task of investigating the tradition of the empty tomb (Mk 16.1-8), which is not available to us until around 70 CE, from a constructivist perspective in a Heidelberg dissertation project.

the closest parallels in form belong to the language of prayer and confession. The second of the *Eighteen Benedictions*, for example, reads: 'Blessed are you, O God, who brings the dead back to life.'[10]

1.2 Prerequisites

Axioms do not fall from heaven, not even in early Christianity. How should the phase *before* the laying of the early Christian axiomatic groundwork be sketched? The axiom is already a product of combining different elements of knowledge. Which at first relatively unconnected units of knowledge entered into the axiomatic groundwork and thus were prerequisites for it?

The four most important ones are:[11] (1) First, the devastating experience of dissonance: Jesus was dead, his work appeared to have failed, his message to be without validity. He had become a miserable and lost wretch.

(2) In his words and actions, the deceased Jesus of Nazareth had proclaimed an encouraging portrait of God. He had interpreted God as a God of loving kindness who turns especially to the lost.

A partial congruence, a similarity, exists between these two elements of knowledge to the extent that both times there is talk about the lost. Congruencies or similarities, however, as we recall, stimulate cognitive construction – first in a negative form: the question arose whether this God who is near to the lost would also turn to *this lost one* from Nazareth, who himself had proclaimed this loving God. Because of the experience of dissonance, the answer at first was negative.

By contrast, the positive cognitive association of the two units of knowledge would state that the God who is near to the miserable also rescued precisely this lost Jesus out of the depths of his death. But we are not yet that far along. More was necessary in order to make this positive association possible.

(3) Jesus also had proclaimed that God had already begun to build up his kingly rule of the end time in the present – precisely *in* the works and words of Jesus himself.[12] Anyone who links this further element of knowledge with the first ends up again at a question: Could it be that even *in* the *mortal* doom of Jesus the building up of God's kingly rule became partially visible? The later answer was yes, but again we are not yet that far along.

[10] Cf., e.g., also the parallel in form of Ps. 115.15: 'the Lord who made heaven and earth'. The confession of the psalm's verses 9-11 is part of a responsive chant between priests and congregation, which in v. 1 begins with a direct prayer address to God. Also the exodus predication of God in Exod. 16.6; Deut. 8.14; Jer. 16.14 needs to be mentioned.

[11] Further units of knowledge will be discussed in the appendix.

[12] Anyone who does *not* agree with the presupposed exegetical decision that the historical Jesus proclaimed an eschatological kingdom of God can get on even without this third element. The building does not thereby collapse. On the proclamation of an eschatological kingdom by the historical Jesus and on the critical discussion of alternative interpretations, see, e.g., J. Becker, *Jesus von Nazareth* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1996) as an excellent source of arguments.

The first three building blocks of knowledge were immediately *relevant* for the circle of the Nazarene's followers, because they touched upon central points of Jesus' proclamation and destiny.

(4) The fourth element of knowledge derived from the apocalyptic tradition of Judaism. It was part of the culture of the Jewish disciples who mourned the deceased Jesus: the Jewish expectation of a general resurrection of the dead in Israel by God at the end of days, which was already fashioned in Judaism, served as the fourth element of knowledge. A variegated range of texts, from Daniel 12 to the second of the *Eighteen Benedictions* ('Blessed are you, O God, who brings the dead back to life'), documents this eschatological hope. Texts such as Hos. 6.2 and Jonah 2 (cf. 1 Cor. 15.4) helped to specify the expectation. But the range of references does not need to be fanned out at this juncture; the appendix will examine the most important documents.

Once this fourth building block of knowledge was combined with the first, again a question arose: how does the life-creating power of God stand in relation to the deceased person of Jesus?

1.3 The axiomatic groundwork

1.3.1

These four elements of knowledge presented an explosive mix that needed only a spark in order to start the reactions, the positive cognitive associations indicated above that constitute our axiom. The spark *did* ignite. It has to do with the sensory perception of the ὤφθη ('he was seen, he appeared'; 1 Cor. 15.5-8), that is, with the visual event that Cephas first experienced: Cephas/Peter 'saw' the deceased Jesus as a living one; and all the indicated cognitive associations among the four building blocks of knowledge could (at least theoretically) be launched. Above all, the fourth building block, which provided the concept of 'resurrection' as a category of perception, was important so that the visual experience was interpreted in *this* sense and not as the appearance of a ghost. The latter would have immediately suggested itself as the category of perception in another cultural milieu.[13]

1.3.2

The origination of the first early Christian proposition 'God raised Jesus from the dead' and its becoming plausible to the first Christian congregation can also be investigated with the help of the semantic criteria (a)–(b) and the pragmatic criterion (c); they play a role, as we recall, in connection with the second, empirical source of evidence (see chapter V above).

[13] Matthew 14.26, Lk. 24.37 oppose the category of ghost – although in many cultural milieus repeatedly the belief has been expressed that precisely those persons who died as victims of violence do not find rest and wander as ghosts.

The brain tends to accept that a sensory perception stems from an object, fact, or event independent from our consciousness – thus rejecting that it is merely a daydream or an illusion of the senses – (a) if the perception can be assigned a significance without major problems and (b) if this significance, via cognitive association, fits into an existing context of meaning.

The condition '(a)' was met on the basis of the conviction of a 'resurrection of the dead by God' fostered in Judaism. This idea served the Easter witnesses as a category of perception. What they saw was a resurrection by God – not a dream, not the appearance of a ghost, not a fairy illusion.

In view of the condition '(b)', as a first context the historical Jesus' proclamation is to be mentioned. Jesus had proclaimed God's merciful turning to the lost and broken (second element of knowledge above) and had claimed that God was at work particularly also *in* his life, in Jesus' own life (third element of knowledge above). The proposition 'God raised Jesus who was lost in death,' found on the basis of visual perception, fit into this context of Jesus' proclamation: God also turned to the lost and broken Jesus (second unit of knowledge above) and made the building up of God's kingdom become partially visible even *in* this death (third unit of knowledge above). God remained true to God's self – or better, to the portrait of God proclaimed by Jesus – and thus validated this Jesus. In this way, a coherence with an existing context emerged. It was capable of advancing the plausibility of the proposition 'the deceased Jesus lives'.

As a second context, the Jewish concept of resurrection needs to be mentioned again (fourth element of knowledge). We do not know whether or not from the beginning the axiomatic proposition 'God raised Jesus from the dead' already triggered all possible apocalyptic associations that could have come to mind on the basis of the Jewish concept of resurrection. However, in connection with this Jewish apocalyptic concept, our early Christian axiom opened the door to manifold cognitive constructions of meaning. To mention only one example: if God raised a dead person – apocalypticists indeed expected the raising of dead for the end time (Daniel 12 et al.) – then the eschaton and the eschatological resurrection of Israel's dead *have begun* at Easter. Jesus is consequently the first of the resurrected dead; the others will follow in the very near future. This cognitive construction of meaning was soon produced,[14] so that the initial axiom developed further into 'God raised Jesus as the first of the dead to be raised at the eschaton.' The seamless fitting of the proposition 'God raised the deceased Jesus' with the apocalyptic context of meaning increased the plausibility of this statement.

Finally, the pragmatic factor '(c)' ran like this: human beings more readily accept a sensory perception – here a vision of a deceased person who is alive – as something independent from their own consciousness if they can expect

[14] Cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15.20; 1 Thess. 4.14.

the perception. Did this factor play a role? We do not know, but it cannot be excluded since the combination of the elements of knowledge 2, 3, and 4 possibly had awakened such a hope: because the kingdom of the God of loving kindness had come near (elements 2–3), as Jesus of Nazareth had proclaimed, should one therefore not also hope for the eschatological event of an imminent resurrection of a deceased person (unit of knowledge 4)?

Psychological studies underpin the hypothesis that such an expectation was nurtured among Jesus' followers. According to these studies, mourners usually nurture the desire to see the deceased person again. Sometimes such hopes are even fulfilled. Researchers have observed that bereaved individuals occasionally have visions or auditions of the deceased person, which comfort and help them to cope with their loss. Even more often mourners feel that the deceased person is present. Especially shock and stress situations (as the disciples had experienced since Jesus' trial) trigger such psychological phenomena.[15]

If we could take into account such an expectant mindset in the days *before* the sensory perception of the ὤφθη ('he appeared'), even though we have no documentation of it, then the plausibility of the proposition 'God raised Jesus from death' would have been increased even more for the first Christians.

1.3.3

On the basis of two sources of evidence, sensory perception and cognitive construction, the statement 'God raised Jesus from the dead' was found, but further factors of evidence were needed in order for the statement to become the axiom for a new construction of reality.

Historically, the following is within our grasp. Other, probably even more than 500, people in Syro-Palestine experienced distinct visionary experiences in a limited time span after Jesus' death, most likely six visions in all (1 Cor. 15.5-8), all of which had the person of Jesus as their object. They reinforced the conviction that God had granted new life, a new personal existence, to the dead Jesus. Historically, hardly anything else can be sorted out with regard to the so-called Easter appearances. But this is already a lot within the frame of our heuristic model: the claim 'God raised Jesus' was not only *capable of being experienced by the senses*, this experience also *repeated* itself, and it *spread* to different persons, so that increasing intersubjectivity began to emerge, an intersubjectivity which was further strengthened by the third source of evidence: *social confirmation*. The 'resurrection witnesses' confirmed their experience with one another. And for those in the wider circle of Jesus' adherents who themselves had no part in the visionary experiences, the issue was *socially confirmed* by the visionaries. As our heuristic model

[15] See Shin Yoshida, *'Wir sind schuld, dass Jesus starb': Trauerarbeit im Urchristentum* (Doctoral Dissertation; Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg, 2009).

predicts, the specifically early Christian knowledge was unevenly distributed from the start and subsequently led to a hierarchy to the extent that witnesses of the resurrection, apostles of both genders (1 Cor. 15.5-8; Rom. 16.7), stood out from other Christians.

Finally, the fourth source of evidence, *positive emotional experience*, also contributed to the laying of the axiomatic groundwork. But this hardly needs to be elaborated. Something is adopted all the more readily as a building stone in one's own reality construct the more attractive it is, and the more helpful it proves to be in living one's life. After Easter, sadness turned into joy, lamentation into doxology. The oldest phrase putting Jesus' resurrection into words most likely had its '*Sitz im Leben*' in praise of God in worship, as we saw.[16]

1.4 Immediate organizational consequences

The historical material is finally to be examined through the lens of a last category of the heuristic model. If an element of knowledge, here the statement 'God raised Jesus', has become relevant for a group, it devotes itself to this unit of knowledge in more detail – also with organizational measures. The behaviour of the group is guided by the new knowledge. This can be observed even for the *status nascendi* of the early Christian context of meaning. After the resurrection proposition had turned up, after Peter and the twelve had twice experienced the content of the proposition by means of visions, organizational activity began. A larger gathering of former Jesus followers (male and female) was convened, more than 500 in number (1 Cor. 15.5-6). The resurrection news reported by Peter and the twelve is the only reason conceivable for this gathering. Otherwise no motive existed for adherents of a criminal who had been crucified by the provincial administration to get involved in a mass gathering that was dangerous for them. Anyone who had belonged to this crucified convict rather went into hiding instead of gathering with other followers of Jesus en masse. Those who convened such a meeting took the first steps toward the 'institutional objectification' of the resurrection message. That then a vision of Jesus also took place for the more than 500 participants was an exceptional *donum superadditum*, in which they could rejoice.

1.5 The further unfolding of the axiomatically founded context

With the help of the heuristic model it would be worthwhile now to describe how the context, once it was given a foundation, *developed*; how the originally

[16] For further details about the positive emotional dimension of the belief in Jesus' resurrection – this belief helped dissolve a range of negative feelings in the Jesus followers (shock, grief, and guilt feelings) – see the book by Shin Yoshida (n. 15), who brings insights of psychological studies into play.

*theo*centric resurrection formula ('God raised') became *Christolog*ically oriented ('he rose'; 1 Thess. 4.14 et al.); how by cognitive construction *majestic predications* from Jewish tradition were quickly applied to Jesus (Son of God, Lord, Messiah-Christ, Son of Man/Judge of the world, etc.). Already pre-Pauline, very ancient formulaic material presented the rising of Jesus as an elevation into a position of power (Phil. 2.9-11; possibly also Rom. 1.3-4).

This suggested itself to the early Christian constructors because (a) God had, as the early Christians understood it, given the prophet Jesus from Nazareth priority before all others to be resurrected in the eschaton. In him, and only in him, an example of the general eschatological resurrection of the dead had been established – already in the present; Jesus was the first. With his rising the beginning of the eschaton was heralded.

(b) If at Easter the eschatological events indeed *began* and thereby the ultimate revelation of God, then – this would have been an unavoidable logical conclusion – the historical Jesus' message that God's kingdom had *drawn near* proved to be true in hindsight. For the early Christians, the Easter event confirmed the message of the historical Jesus. By raising Jesus and thus *initiating* the eschaton, God obviously committed to the image of a God drawing near that Jesus had proclaimed. God's act of raising authorized the work of Jesus of Nazareth, not only formally (like an award is given to an outstanding person), but also with regard to content. *By starting off the eschatological events at Easter, God appeared to stand by what Jesus had promised.*

We realize that for the visionary experiences of the first Christians everything hung on the choice of the category of perception. As soon as Easter was classified not as one of many ghost appearances but as an antedated special case of the general eschatological resurrection of the dead, as the only one anywhere, majestic attributes followed with logical force. These only needed to be developed.

(c) Additional motives reinforced the logical necessity to attribute majestic traits to Jesus. Already before Easter the Nazarene claimed authority (see Q Luke 12.8/Mt. 10.32; Mk 8.38/Lk. 9.26; Q Luke 11.20/Mt. 12.28 et al.). Already before Easter some of his followers seem to have placed messianic expectations in Jesus (see the tradition behind Mk 11.1-10 et al.). After Easter, these pre-Easter memories could be brought into play.

(d) Recently Shin Yoshida,[17] on the basis of psychological studies, identified an additional motive for the development of a Christology. In order to be able to cope with the death of a loved one, mourners very often idealize the deceased person. Especially after a death that was brought about *violently* and *unexpectedly*, researchers have observed the phenomenon of idealization,

[17] Yoshida, '*Wir sind schuld, dass Jesus starb*' (note 15 above), 74ff.

but also in connection with *feelings of guilt* that plague the bereaved. All three conditions hold for the case of the violently and unexpectedly killed Jesus and his followers, who felt guilty because of their failings during Jesus' passion (Peter had denied his association with Jesus; they had run away – except for the female adherents who watched the crucifixion from a distance). Christological idealization helped the mourners to cope with their guilt feelings and with the loss of the physical presence of their master. Thus, there were also psychological reasons for the first Christians to develop a Christology of majestic attributes.

How did the early Christians unfold the Christological aspects of their new context? They bent over the ancient scriptures and began to investigate diligently whether God in the sacred texts had already hinted at the extraordinary and eschatological Jesus event. An abundance of Old Testament statements could be transferred to the risen Jesus in order to express his majesty.[18] Psalm 110.1, by way of example ('Sit at my right hand . . .'), was used more than a dozen times as a Christological building stone in the New Testament.[19] The Christians' diligent cognitive constructing made use of traditional language material, above all the Old Testament. In this way new light suddenly shone on old texts. The original meaning no longer counted; the 'proper' sense of these texts was discovered. For example, divine words originally spoken to the historical kings in Jerusalem ('I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill . . . you are my son, today I have begotten you' [Ps. 2.6-7]) were read as God's words to Jesus Christ.[20]

The tracing of this exciting Christological development – and the re-reading of Jewish, especially Old Testament, writings going hand in hand with it – already fills books and does not need to be reworked here.[21] In the following sections (2–5), I will therefore move on to other stages of the unfolding of the early Christian social context of meaning.

1.6 A controversy that cannot be decided by historical scholarship

Let us take a step back. Within the categories of our model we sketched the laying of an axiomatic foundation for the early Christian social context. But this is not the only outcome. The main result is that, from a constructivist

[18] Such hermeneutical freedom was not new; non-Christian Jewish scribes also practised it. They had shown, e.g., how one divests the figurative speech in Daniel 7 of its original meaning by stylizing the originally collective figure of the son of man, who represented Israel, to the figure of an individual eschatological saviour and judge. On this, see appendix, section 3 below.

[19] Rom. 8.34; 1 Cor. 15.25; Mt. 22.44; 26.64; Mk 12.36; 14.62; (16.19); Lk. 20.42-43; 22.69; Acts 2.34-35; Eph. 1.20; Col. 3.1; Heb. 1.3, 13; 8.1; 10.12.

[20] Heb. 1.5; 5.5; cf. Mt. 3.17; 4.3; Lk. 3.22; Jn 1.49; Acts 13.33.

[21] Recently, e.g., A. Rascher, 'Christologie und Schriftauslegung im Hebräerbrief (Dissertation, Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg, 2006), focusing on the example of Hebrews. Later I will discuss examples of this development in the appendix, for instance the Christology of Son of Man/Judge of the World.

perspective, it is senseless to argue among historians whether the early Christian Easter experiences were 'received' visions or visions 'generated' merely by the human psyche; that is, whether in the Christophanies (of 1 Cor. 15.5-8) a Jesus who was raised to life manifested himself, or whether the personal existence of the human being Jesus had irretrievably come to an end in his death on the cross and the genesis of the first vision is to be sought exclusively in the psychic conditions of Peter (unavailable to us in the sources); Peter's zeal in turn would explain the genesis of the other visions – as a chain reaction. Such arguing among historians, from a constructivist epistemological perspective, is pointless, and in view of the current non-theological debates about concepts of reality obsolete. Why? If we as historians attempt to describe the early Christian (constructed) reality of that time, we cannot but formulate that these visions were 'received' visions: for the early Christians these Christophanies meant that a raised person actively got in touch with them, manifesting himself as one who was alive. This is how the early Christians understood their world, and a historian can consider herself fortunate if she comes close to this world constructed by them. However, as far as the *ontic reality* 'behind' the constructed reality of the early Christian believers is concerned, we have *eo ipso* no access to it. From a constructivist epistemological point of view, the controversy about the ontic reality 'behind' these visions – whether received or generated – is therefore *eo ipso* not a scholarly dispute that could be settled on the field of historical research or by intensifying historical inquiry.

What kind of argument is it then? It is the controversy among everyday people about the better construct of reality at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Nothing more, because whether someone decides for or against a categorizing of the early Christian Easter experiences as 'received' depends on the reality that he or she has already constructed *for himself or herself personally* – *before* any work of historical research has even begun. The construct of reality that serves as basis for one verdict ('received visions') counts on the existence of God and on God's creating activity in the events of the world. The design of reality on which the contrary thesis is based excludes on principle a creative activity of God that is capable of granting a deceased person new personal existence. Which of the two constructed realities is better today is open to dispute. But one should not pretend that this controversy is an argument that can be settled by historical research.[22]

[22] See further below for a sketch of a constructivist theory of historiography (in chapter IX).

2 The Irrelevance of Worldly Distinctions

On the basis of the constructivist premises (see chapters II–III above), all talk about a principal equality of human beings cannot be an ontological statement. Principal equality – like freedom of the human will (see chapter III, section 3 above) or human dignity[23] – cannot be *detected* in ontic reality and then expressed in words. They always only represent constructs of reality in our brains, *attributions*, which are negotiated intersubjectively and then prompt effects in human behaviour.

In Gal. 3.28 Paul claims: whatever the worldly distinctions between you Galatians may be, they are abolished. 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave nor free, no longer male and female.'

The text distinguishes between two constructs of reality that stand in contrast to each other. On the one side, the text verbalizes the worldly, Hellenistic-Roman context, in which Jews are set apart from Greeks, and those who by law are not free from those who are free, as well as men from women. On the other side, the Christian community has carried out a paradigm shift. In their new construct of reality, human beings are no longer differentiated from one another in this way. In house churches and other social contacts of Christians among themselves such worldly differences are ignored; they have become irrelevant, so that one person is like another. This is what 'you all are one' (εἷς) means. All of you are one and the same, you do not differ from one another. A paraphrase would be: 'You all are one (like the other).' Contrary to a widespread assumption, the masculine εἷς cannot mean that all Christians constitute 'one (ecclesiastical) body'; the neuter gender of σῶμα ('body') renders this impossible.

2.1 The new context of Gal. 3.28 as intersubjectively shared reality

In the first instance, the new context portrayed in Gal. 3.28 is a subjective one in Paul's mind. Beyond that, however, it is also an intersubjective context, a new *social* reality in the early Christian communities. From what is it possible to draw this conclusion?

(a) The text of 3.27-28 picks up a *pre*-Pauline concept of baptism: in baptism and in life after baptism worldly distinctions among those who are baptized become irrelevant. Their worldly statuses notwithstanding all Christians are assured of *the same* proximity to Christ; all are saved and accepted by Christ without distinction. The relationship to Christ granted equally to all believers results in equality among those who are baptized.

[23] On human dignity and the New Testament, see P. Lampe, 'Menschliche Würde in frühchristlicher Perspektive', in E. Herms (ed.), *Menschenbild und Menschenwürde* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 288–304.

The apostle holds the Galatians accountable to this construct of reality. If it only existed in *Paul's* mind, he would first have to attempt to convince the Galatians of it. He would first have to push for achieving intersubjectivity, which he does not do. Rather, he presupposes that the construct has already been objectified, employing it as a self-evident building stone for his argumentation in the letter.

(b) Paul argues against the Galatians that Torah observances, especially circumcision, bestow no advantage on Jewish Christians over uncircumcised gentile Christians. All Christians are without distinction 'children of God through faith' (3.26). '*In Christ*' the distinction between gentile and Jewish Christians is irrelevant. This means, however, that the other distinctions mentioned in verse 3.28, the distinctions between slaves and free persons as well as between men and women, exceed the frame of the argumentation of this Galatians chapter, leading to the conclusion that the text of 3.27-28 comprises a traditional formula that is older than Paul's epistle to the Galatians.

This conclusion is all the more valid since the text combines terms that otherwise are only very rarely encountered in Paul. ἔνι ('there is'), used three times in succession in our text, is found elsewhere in Paul only in 1 Cor. 6.5; ἄρσεν ('male') and θῆλυ ('female') elsewhere only in Rom. 1.26-27. The pre-Pauline piece of tradition presents a formula structured in threefold parallelism.

(c) If we thus can assume that the irrelevance of worldly differences among Christians existed not only in Paul's mind but also as a trans-subjective construct of reality in the minds of the members of his congregations, then this does not mean that these congregations automatically always acted in accord with this construct; the Galatians did not in respect to the difference between Jewish and gentile Christians. As we observe in ourselves time after time, there frequently is a 'friction loss' between mental context and behaviour, which we need to deal with again later. Nonetheless, in spite of such a loss, our sources document behaviour that is in accordance with the construct of the irrelevance of worldly distinctions: In the first Christian generation, *women* had remarkable influence on the life of the congregations, which does not need to be proved once again here. Only towards the end of the first century were vigorous attempts made to cut off this influence.[24]

Furthermore, in spite of some well-known cases of conflict (e.g. Gal. 2.12-21), gentile Christian congregations, like those in the capital city of Rome, often enough integrated *Jewish and gentile Christians* without problems, without one group gaining priority over the other.[25]

[24] Further on this, e.g., P. Lampe and U. Luz, 'Nachpaulinisches Christentum und pagane Gesellschaft', in J. Becker et al., *Die Anfänge des Christentums: Alte Welt und Neue Hoffnung* (Stuttgart : Kohlhammer, 1987), 185–216, here 189–93.

[25] Cf. P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (2nd edn; Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 53–63 and throughout.

Slaves were often treated with brotherly and sisterly affection as *pares*, as Paul substantiates by means of his letter to Philemon. In this letter, he places himself on the same level as Onesimus, the slave who had become a Christian (Philemon 6, 12, 16–18), and expects that Onesimus' master Philemon will also abdicate his rights as a master and receive Onesimus with kindness as an equal brother when he comes home (16–17).

To sum up, we can assume that – in spite of 'friction losses' – the irrelevance of ethnic, legal, socio-economic, and gender-specific distinctions belonged to the social construct of reality of the first Christian generation, at least insofar as they lived under Pauline influence.

2.2 Commuters between two contexts

Does this mean that the Christians had put the old, Hellenistic-Roman social context completely aside? By no means; otherwise baptized Christians would have had to emigrate from the world, which was not Paul's intention (1 Cor. 5.10).

Whenever Christians went about in the streets of a Hellenistic city, in the market, or in some other place among pagan people, they were still part of the context of the Hellenistic-Roman culture. They continued to attend to their work as slaves, continued to live in gender roles as man and woman, and were still shaped by their Jewish or pagan past. In the worldly social context, these distinctions were not removed. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 7, in view of the impending eschaton, Paul actually encouraged the Christians to remain in their roles of the worldly context and not to push for freedom from slavery or to terminate married life with a pagan partner. They all should continue to live in the worldly status that they had occupied at the time when they received baptism and accepted the paradigm shift towards the Christian social context (Gal. 3.27). Each one should remain in his or her κλῆσις ('calling').

Paul specified this recommendation. Within the worldly context, in which Christians continued to live after their baptism, they should not *actively* pursue changing their status, but willingly accept change if it was imposed on them *passively*. If a master decided to set a slave free, the slave should welcome this decision. If a pagan spouse wanted to separate for any reason, it should be accepted (1 Cor. 7.15, 21). Whatever worldly statuses the environment imposed on the Christians, they should fit willingly into these worldly roles, because the eschaton was hastily approaching and it was no longer worthwhile to bother about one's worldly positioning.

What then changed with baptism? What is fascinating is that after baptism the early Christians lived in *two* contexts. In carrying out life outside the church in the pagan environment, the motto of equality of the Christian context was merely a mental context.

Is it possible for mental and social contexts to co-exist? Here it becomes apparent how well the theoretical apparatus of the constructivist sociology

of knowledge fits the situation implied by Gal. 3.28. Socially interacting individuals in their minds can simultaneously accept both the present social context and another deviating mental context. For instance, in a stadium filled with an animated crowd it is possible to become excited about a team and its ability, that is, to enter into the social context of a sporting event, and still at the same time to allow a second, mental context to be at work in one's head – for example a social-psychological one, which enables studying mass behaviour in a stadium and interpreting it in social-psychological categories. The participants in a situation are always free to have a deviating mental context in their head alongside the intersubjectively shared context of the situation. Therefore, time and again the constructed realities of people who are together at the same time in the same place can differ in astonishing ways.

Applied to early Christians this means: outside in the 'world', Christians moved about within the confines of the social context of Hellenistic-Roman culture by still playing their roles as slaves, free persons, as women and men. At the same time, however, they had the mental context in their head that such worldly distinctions count for nothing before God and in the church.

This *mental* context became the *social* context as soon as these Christians got together and then – most often – treated one another as sisters and brothers, detaching themselves from the worldly distinctions of the old social context. Then they knew themselves no longer κατὰ σάρκα ('according to the flesh', 2 Cor. 5.16), in order to use their own language.

However, it was quite possible that one or another of the Christians was not completely absorbed in the new social context but simultaneously still had the Hellenistic-Roman context in mind. Such persons, possibly enjoying a somewhat respected status in the world, would have felt uncomfortable when a Christian slave in the house church tapped them on the shoulder all too intimately.[26] Others might have felt uneasy when women such as Prisca,[27] Junia,[28] or the patron Phoebe[29] performed functions of leadership in the congregation. A man could also have been torn between two contexts in his mind, when during the worship service he felt sexually attracted to a fellow female Christian, although this did not fit well with the new social context of Gal. 3.28 ('neither male nor female'). It was no accident that Paul urged women to cover their heads demurely during worship (1 Cor. 11.2-16). To be sure, in this text he gave other reasons than the distraction of men. He appealed above all to tradition and custom. But without doubt his ruling

[26] Cf. 1 Tim. 6.2: Slaves 'who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are fellow believers; rather they must serve them all the more.'

[27] In Rom. 16.3; Acts 18.18, 26; 2 Tim. 4.19, she is named before her husband. Along with him she hosted various house churches.

[28] According to Rom. 16.7, she was either a female apostle herself or at least highly esteemed by the circle of apostles.

[29] Rom. 16.1-2.

dampened sexual tensions, regardless of whether he consciously had this in mind or not. At least in v. 10 he is aware that unveiled heads of women can be a temptation – albeit to the angels. According to Gal. 3.28, in the new social reality of the Christian communities the old gender roles were supposed to lose their force, therefore also – this may or may not be regretted – the erotic tension between the sexes decreased, as far as this was possible for the individual persons.[30]

People simultaneously having two contexts in their head were the most likely to be responsible for the 'friction loss' mentioned, which, in the translation of a construct of reality into behaviour, always occurs.

By way of contrast, other Christians would have been so absorbed in the new social context that for the duration of the Christian gatherings they completely blocked out the context of the Hellentistic-Roman 'world'.

Constructivism thus provides an adequate apparatus of categories to describe the side-by-sideness of the two constructed realities that are addressed by New Testament texts such as Gal. 3.28. Early Christian men and women lived in two contexts, between which they shuttled back and forth, and in so doing one of the two became the social context and the other the mental context. Which context at any one time was one or the other depended on with whom these early Christian people interacted – with people like themselves or pagans.

The juxtaposition of the two contexts proved to be more complicated and hold more potential for conflict whenever in the everyday life *of the same household* they intersected, in households in which (not only men and women, a pagan marriage partner with a Christian one, Christian slaves with pagan masters, but also) *Christian* slaves with *Christian* masters associated with one another. In Colossae, the tricky question arose for Philemon, the master of the converted Onesimus, to which context he should give more weight in the everyday life of his house, without completely destroying the other context. To the Christian context? Or should he just implement the Christian one as a social context during the Sunday worship services of his house church? To which context, in the various situations of everyday life, should he give the status of a merely mental context and to which should he bestow the status of the intersubjectively lived social context? Should he switch back and forth in everyday life? Paul did not solve this problem. According to Paul's letter, Onesimus should be viewed and treated as a brother (Christian context), but he was not to be set free because of that[31] – true to the slogan of 1 Cor. 7.17. He still would have to sweep the floor, for instance (worldly context).[32]

[30] See further 1 Cor. 7.29, 32; especially 7.37-40. Paul allows for exceptions.

[31] In his letter, Paul nowhere asks Philemon for Onesimus' manumission, at least not expressedly.

[32] See further P. Lampe, 'Der Brief an Philemon', in N. Walter, E. Reinmuth, and P. Lampe, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, Thessalonicher und an Philemon* (NTD 8/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 203–32.

2.3 A defiant escape from the double world of two contexts: the Revelation of John

Not all early Christian groups were able to endure the tension-filled life in two such different social contexts. Let us jump ahead another generation and a half into the nineties of the first century. In Asia Minor at that time, the author of the Revelation of John perceived the juxtaposition of the Roman-Hellenistic and the early Christian contexts as extremely antagonistic and baulked at being integrated at all into the Hellenistic-Roman world. He was driven to this acrimony by the fact that the propaganda of the Asia Minor priesthood of the emperor cult increasingly pressed for everyone to participate in this cult. In Laodicea, for example, a temple to the emperor Domitian was erected in 83 CE. In Ephesus a colossus of the emperor towered in the precincts of the temple of Artemis. In Asia Minor the syncretistic association of indigenous religions with the imperial cult had climbed to a pinnacle. Accordingly, the author of the Revelation of John portrayed the Roman emperor as a dreadful beast, assisted by a second monster, the imperial priesthood in the province.[33] The apocalypticist complained: the priesthood of the imperial cult 'causes all, both small and great, . . . to be marked on the right hand or on the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, which is the name of the beast'.[34] This passage can be compared with Pliny the Younger's *Epistle* 10.96.10: Christians were denounced by malevolent people when they did not buy sacrificial meat in the marketplace, when they did not participate in public celebrations or take an oath in the name of the emperor. As John the apocalypticist assessed his situation, all those who did not worship the divine emperor risked their lives.[35] A few professing their faith had already been executed.[36] The apocalypticist expected an extensive persecution of the Christians in Asia Minor (which however did not take place!) and felt his present age to be a time of severe tribulation,[37] in which it was essential to 'persevere' and to 'overcome with endurance'.[38] 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death' (2.10); 'blessed are the dead who from now on will die in the Lord' (14.13). It was essential not to deny the name of Christ, not to give in to the propaganda of the imperial cult, not an inch (3.8). The alternative Christ or Caesar was an absolute either-or for John the apocalypticist, with no room for compromise.

[33] Cf. Rev. 12.18–13.10 with respect to the emperor, and 13.11-18; 16.13 with respect to the priesthood of the imperial cult.

[34] Rev. 13.16-17.

[35] Rev. 13.15.

[36] Rev. 2.13; 6.9-11.

[37] Rev. 1.9; 2.9-10, 13; 7.14; 13.7-10; 16.6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2, 20; 20.4.

[38] Rev. 2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 11-12, 21; 21.7; cf. 1.9; 2.2-3, 19; 3.10; 12.11; 13.10; 14.12.

Against this background, he contrasted the Christian and the Roman-Hellenistic contexts and caricatured the latter as a mirror image and a mockery of the former.

- As God stands at the apex of the Christian context, at the apex of the Roman-Hellenistic context the devil is enthroned.
- As Christ receives his power from God, so the emperor receives his from the devil (13.2, 4).
- As the risen Christ is characterized by the mark of his death (5.6; 'a lamb, looking as if it had been slain'), so the Emperor Domitian is the risen Nero who has reappeared and whose body shows his fatal wound, which healed (13.3, 12, 14).
- As God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit belong together, so the devil, the emperor, and the pseudo-prophetic beast (the priesthood of the imperial cult) form a satanic triad (16.13; 20.10).
- The pseudo-prophetic beast bestows life like the Holy Spirit (see 13.15 with 11.11) and is disguised as a lamb with horns like Christ (13.11).
- The mark of the beast (7.3; 13.16) corresponds to the seal of baptism for Christians.

For the apocalypticist John, the new social context of the Christians – as a *counter-reality*[39] to the social context of the Hellenistic-Roman environment – also manifested itself in a differing morality. In the 'world' there was slaughtering (18.24), and in spite of rising prices and hunger in the province (6.5-6) people in Rome were living in luxury (17.4; 18.12, 16). In this world, 'slaves and human souls' (18.13) were going to the dogs. But in the Christian context 'love of the brothers and sisters' counted, the melting away of the distinction between 'small' and 'great ones' (1.9; 20.12; 19.5). Even Christ, so the apocalypticist affirmed, will share his throne with the Christians in a fraternal way (3.21; 20.6), in defiance of all hierarchical posturing in the world – and in the church. In his writings, John the apocalypticist simply ignored the hierarchical structures that by the end of the first century had also developed in the Christian congregations. He only acknowledged prophecy as an office in the congregations he addressed.[40]

[39] Cf. also the secular royal titles *basileus*/king (e.g. Mt. 2.2) and *kyrios*/lord (e.g. Rom. 1.4), which were applied to Christ in early Christianity, as well as the *parousia* term: in the Graeco-Roman environment it denoted the arrival of the emperor, but the Christians converted it into a term for the eschatological return of Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 15.23). Around 70 CE, the Gospel of Mark, for example, consciously constructed a counter-world to the Roman one. The story of Jesus calming the storm (Mk 4.35-41) for instance used motifs that otherwise were reported about powerful men of the world. In 4.22ff.; 8.27ff. events are narrated about Jesus that otherwise were circulating about Vespasian. On these and other passages and their pagan parallels, see P. Lampe, 'Heidnischer Mythos und christlicher Widerstand', in P. Lampe, *Felsen im Fluss* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 33–48, especially 47–48.

[40] Cf. 10.7; 11.18; 16.6; 19.10; 22.6, 16.

Radical apocalyptic antitheses and the refusal to blend into the old Hellenistic-Roman context in some or another way characterized this way of dealing with the juxtaposition of the two contexts. Like many other early Christian teachers, John the apocalypticist, as all indications suggest,[41] was not sedentary, but had become an itinerant prophet and preacher roaming in Asia Minor, a dropout from the Hellenistic-Roman context. With the construction of a counter-world, the early Christians implemented a partial *liberation* from the Hellenistic-Roman world. A partial emigration out of the world was lived out, which in the radical case of John the apocalypticist was coupled with death-defying readiness for martyrdom. 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful until death' (2.10).

2.4 Irenic rapprochement of the two contexts

There was a less radical way, preferred by most early Christians, of dealing with the tension-filled juxtaposition of the two social contexts. In the course of time, the new Christian context of meaning was toned down a little, that is, it was partially adapted to the old Hellenistic-Roman context. Thus, in spite of the doctrine of equality, hierarchical structures slowly also developed in the church, and up until the end of the first century in many places the influence of women, who originally were on an equal level within the church, was forced back.[42]

Galatians 3.28, the inconvenient motto of the first generation, did not become the most quoted text in post-Pauline literature. To be sure, the Epistle to the Colossians, probably composed by a disciple of Paul,[43] still picked up the verse: 'There is no longer Greek and Jew . . . slave and free' (Col. 3.11). But 'neither man nor woman' from Galatians 3 is already missing. And in Col. 3.22–4.1, Christian slaves are admonished to obey their masters – only a few verses after the programmatic statement that there is 'no longer slave nor free'.

The maxim of 'equality' – not only before God but also in carrying out life in the Christian congregations – most often faded in church history into a traditional saying, into a mental construct of dreamers. Only occasionally did this motto light up once again as an element of intersubjectively shared reality, supported by a church community and thus affecting behaviour. Even though the principle of equality is not capable of being an ontological proposition (which would disclose something about the ontic reality of us humans), as a constructed attribution – 'you all are equal' – it has the explosive potential of having an impact on human behaviour, in the same

[41] See P. Lampe, 'Die Apokalyptiker – ihre Situation und ihr Handeln', in U. Luz, J. Kegler, P. Lampe, and P. Hoffmann, *Eschatologie und Friedenshandeln* (2nd edn; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 59–114, here 109–11.

[42] See Lampe and Luz, 'Nachpaulinisches Christentum', 189–93.

[43] Still very useful E. Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (EKK; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976).

way as other constructions do (for example, 'as a human you have dignity'). Together with the Stoic maxim of equality grounded in natural law the Christian maxim of 'equality' radiated out into the secular realm, even into our modern constitutions.

3 The 'New Creation' of Human Beings

3.1 An ontological proposition?

Let us turn to the ontologically delicate concept of the new creation (καινὴ κτίσις): in baptism Christians are created anew. 'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away; see, the new has come' (2 Cor. 5.17; cf. Gal. 6.15).[44] How 'realistically' is this to be understood? To pick up the old question of exegetes, what is the 'ontological character' of the new creation that takes place in the personality of the baptized? According to Peter Stuhlmacher's interpretation of Paul,[45] for the baptized to become a new creation resulted from being called by the Creator. The Creator's call to the Christian faith 'really' alters the pre-baptismal existence. Pre-Pauline and Pauline Christianity understood baptism as an 'actual' transformation of the human personality by God's creating word. This is the inside perspective of exegesis that seeks to reproduce the understanding of Paul and other early Christians.

Let us consider this view from the outside. Does it turn out to be an 'illusion'? Not at all. To be sure, from an outside constructivist perspective, the early Christians constructed an element of reality that concerned themselves: Their model of the 'I' implied that in becoming a Christian a radical rebuilding of personality occurred. Furthermore, the question as to whether or not this model of the 'I' corresponded to the ontic reality of the baptized is in principle beyond what we can answer, as we elaborated in chapter III, section 3; this holds true for *all* talk about the 'I'. Exegetes therefore should no longer chase after such ontological answers. However, all of this does not mean that the early Christians' model of the self was mere illusion. More appropriate than the ontological question is the constructivistic inquiry about what sources of evidence this early Christian image of the self fed on and what consequences for behaviour it triggered. What made this model appear plausible to early Christian constructors so that it was embraced as a social reality and became effective in the early Christian communities? Such sources of evidence made sure that a constructed reality was more than just a dream or illusion.

[44] Whether 'new creation' in Paul also possesses a cosmological meaning cannot be discussed here. On the ethical aspects of 'new creation', see 2 Cor. 5.14-17; Gal. 6.13-15; Jubilees 19.25; Targum on 1 Chron. 4.23.

[45] 'Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der καινὴ κτίσις bei Paulus', *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967): 1–35.

3.2 Evidence through cognitive construction (baptism)

The first step on the way to plausibility was taken with the help of cognitive construction, starting as soon as similarity ('evidence through congruence') was discovered between the baptismal ritual of *being immersed* and *surfacing* from the water on the one hand and the *death* and *resurrection* of Christ on the other. Connecting the two events created new meaning: (a) the candidates for baptism, so it was figured, participate in the death-and-resurrection destiny of Christ when they are immersed and re-emerge from the water. They are 'buried with him' when going under and 'raised' with Christ when resurfacing (Romans 6). (b) It was thus conceived that the two events, baptism and the past Christ event, become *simultaneous* in the sacrament: the death-and-resurrection destiny of Christ is being made present in the sacrament of baptism. In Romans 6, the apostle is not constructing on his own, but is relying on baptismal tradition.[46]

Understood as such, the sacrament of baptism was a *cognitive construction that had congealed into a ritual.* As a cognitive combination of various elements of knowledge, it created meaning and was dramatized again and again in ritual praxis. The same thing will become apparent in respect to the Eucharist in section 4.

In distinction from the ancient church, for a long time modern exegesis frowned upon seeing behind Romans 6 a so-called 'mystery drama' in which immersion in water represented death and burial and emerging represented the resurrection.[47] But it is difficult to imagine that Paul and the Hellenistic Christians before him thought of being taken up in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism without being aware of the similarities of immersion/death and emerging/new life. These analogies immediately suggested themselves. Having said this, we nonetheless leave the question aside of whether or not pre-Pauline or Pauline congregations celebrated a full-blown liturgical-theatrical 'mystery drama' in their baptism rituals. What concerns us at the moment is the cognitive combination of similar elements, not the form of its ritual embodiment.

[46] The content of the entire verse Rom. 6.3 is likely pre-Pauline and was shared by the Romans, otherwise the introductory formula 'do you not know?' would be meaningless. For details see, e.g., D. Hellholm, 'Enthymemic Argumentation in Paul: The Case of Romans 6', in T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 154; against, e.g., H. D. Betz, 'Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6', ibid., 100.

[47] For bibliographical references, see, e.g., Betz, 'Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6', 112–13.

In my opinion, Betz[48] is correct in assuming that ὁμοίωμα ('likeness') in Rom. 6.5 stands for the ritual of baptism. The ritual is a 'likeness' of Christ's past death (6.5). It represents this death and makes it become present, so that the candidate for baptism participates in this past event.

However, even in Betz's interpretation, the phrase 'we are closely united with the likeness (= with the ritual representation) of his death' (6.5) still remains difficult. It would basically mean that 'we are closely united with baptism', which does not make that much sense. Betz overlooks an alternative translation: 'If we were closely united with his (past) death by means of the likeness (= by means of the ritual representation of Christ's death = by means of baptism), we will also be closely united with his resurrection.'[49] The close connection with the ritual of baptism is not relevant, but rather the close connection with Christ's past death in this ritual.

3.3. Evidence through experiencing (baptism, experiences of the Spirit)

A cognitive construction transposed into a physical ritual opened up space for experiences. It made available a category of perception, which was capable of causing the important empirical source of evidence to spring forth, so that plausibility emerged on the basis of experience and sensory perception.

Once again, what was perceived in adult baptism? Pre-Pauline Christians interpreted the event in the categories of Romans 6 and perceived correspondingly that in the ritual of the baptismal bath, Christ's death and resurrection were made present, and the candidates thus were caught up in the death and resurrection of Christ. In the submersion of the body in water, they experienced *physically* that they die with Christ, 'buried with him' (Rom. 6.4-6; cf. Gal. 2.19b; Rom. 7.4); they were baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6.3). In emerging again, at least enthusiasts like the Corinthians experienced that they rose with Christ.[50] Paul modified this enthusiastic interpretation of baptism to the effect that, in baptism, God empowers Christians to *behave* in new and better ways (Rom. 6.4), but their eschatological resurrection still remains in the future (6.5, 8). In the ritual carrying out of the submersion and emerging, candidates for baptism perceive a death and a renewal in themselves – they are created anew.

[48] Betz, 'Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6', 115.

[49] σύμφυτοι ('closely united with') can take not only the dative but also the genitive (see, e.g., B. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* [14th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975], 182.1). Our reading avoids a conjecture 'united *with him*' or the hard and unreasonable 'united with the (ritual) representation of his death'. The genitive following ὁμοίωμα does not relate to ὁμοίωμα (differently from, e.g., Rom. 1.23), but to σύμφυτοι. Literally translated, ὁμοίωμα means 'something made alike'.

[50] Cf. chapter I above. Accordingly, a future eschatological resurrection appeared to the Corinthians to be superfluous (1 Corinthians 15).

In addition, in the immersion event the candidates for baptism are 'given the one Spirit to drink' (1Cor. 12.13; cf. 6.17; 10.4). Since the Spirit is identical with Christ (2 Cor. 3.17), in this way Christ is internalized. Accordingly, 'it is not longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2.20). When the candidates have come out of the water, dried off, and put on a new garment, they 'have clothed [themselves] with Christ' (Gal. 3.27; cf. Rom. 13.14).

Such an initiation ritual, an impressive experience shaped by a concept, was apt to produce evidence, rendering the self-image 'I am a new creation now' plausible. Charismatic experiences, which appeared in addition, above all speaking in tongues and prophecy, were perceived as the effects of being filled with the Spirit in baptism and did their part in making the early Christian self-image of being created anew appear plausible.

3.4 Evidence through repeated, institutionalized experiences (worship, Eucharist)

Weekly worship services allowed for reiteration of the experiences, which is important for the production of evidence. The meetings provided an institutional frame for renewed charismatic experiences (1 Corinthians 12–14). Above all, not only did the one-time baptism mean being taken up into Jesus' death that was made present in the sacrament, but the regularly repeated Eucharist also had this meaning.[51] Those who united themselves with the crucified Christ in the sacramental rituals, thus experiencing themselves as being lastingly 'crucified with him',[52] saw their 'I' radically rebuilt, created anew after passing through ritually experienced death (Gal. 2.20).

In other words, not only the pneumatic-charismatic experiences, but especially also the institutionalized sacraments promoted evidence by sensory perception – on the basis of cognitive construction.

[51] According to Paul, not only in baptism but also in the Eucharist Christ's death was made present (1 Cor. 11.26; see further in section 4 below). Accordingly, the participants in the Eucharist also enter into 'fellowship' (κοινωνία) with Christ's mortal body and mortal suffering (1 Cor. 10.16-17). On all of this, see P. Lampe, 'Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1Kor 11,17–34)', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1991): 183–213, here 206–13.

[52] Cf. Gal 2.19b. The perfect tense expresses an *enduring* condition (since baptism).

3.5 Evidence through experiences that grasp all participants of a context, and through resultant social confirmation

Finally, alongside the reiteration of evidence-producing experiences, alongside their institutional objectification in weekly meetings and rituals, there was also the broad dissemination of such experiences. *Each* Christian went through the ritual of baptism as an individual person and experienced the Eucharistic meals. Furthermore, the probability for each individual of being affected by the charismatic phenomena was high, because in the dynamics of the group meetings there was little control of the pneumatic events, as the touches of chaos in the Corinthian worship services document (1 Corinthians 12; 14). Theoretically, the dynamics could carry *each* person away. The Spirit 'blows where it will' (Jn 3.8).

Correspondingly, ecclesiastical functions were still fluctuating in the young churches. *Each* member of a congregation could fulfil them: speaking in tongues, translating such ecstatic speeches, healing and other marvels, prophecy, testing prophetic speech, helping and serving, carrying out functions of leadership (1 Cor. 12.4ff., 28). Even the leadership of a community was not yet tied to one person, not even to a clearly defined group.[53] No individual leader was responsible for an orderly course of the worship service, its beginning, and the sequence of its elements (cf. also 11.17-34). The entire congregation bore responsibility for it (14.26ff.). Thus, spontaneity was the rule; the Spirit led.

What we discover in the historical sources corresponds to the social-psychological insight that in newly founded small groups in principle *everybody* can carry out the tasks and fulfil the functions that are vital for the group's life. Only little by little do 'specialists' crystallize who repeatedly perform the same functions and avoid others. 'Positions' develop. Seeds are planted for the development of defined offices.[54] In early Christianity, especially in Corinth, alongside 'apostles', only 'teachers' and 'prophets' acted as such specialists. However, not even prophecy was *exclusively* performed by such experts yet. It was open to everyone; it goes without saying also to women (1 Cor. 11.5).

To sum up: In their Christian lives, all baptized persons were exposed to the depicted experiences, thus experiencing being created anew. Since this empirical knowledge was shared by all of them, albeit in different intensities,

[53] In the Corinthian leadership, Stephanas, for example, stands out; his household was the first in Corinth to become Christian and he was actively engaged in the congregation in exceptional ways (1 Cor. 16.15-16; cf. Rom. 12.8; 1 Thess. 5.12), without him thereby having a monopoly on the κυβερνήσεις (1 Cor. 12.28), that is, on the 'acts of leadership'. Leadership lay in many hands.

[54] Cf., e.g., A. M. Snadowsky, 'Problemlösung im Kommunikationsnetz von experimentellen Kleingruppen', in A. Heigl-Evers (ed.), *Sozialpsychologie*, vol I, *Die Erforschung der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen* (Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 1984), 451–62, here 452.

the members of the congregations could, along a broad front, confirm to one another the idea that Christians are created anew in baptism. Thus, congregational meetings, in which like-minded people and 'experts' with different gifts were present (1 Corinthians 12; 14), provided evidence through social confirmation.

3.6 Evidence through emotional experiences

The rituals also provided evidence through strong positive emotional experiences. The sacramental rituals and meetings were emotionally appealing celebrations of intimate fellowship: on the one hand with Christ, on the other with people who were devoted to one another. In the small early Christian groups, that is, in churches meeting in private homes, baptism meant initiation into a fellowship of people who were usually devoted to one another in a familial, if not in an affectionate manner. In other words, the rituals and gatherings that conveyed and stabilized the Christian self-image of being created anew were emotionally undergirded in a positive way and thus all the more effective in producing evidence.

Yet, this was not the only emotional aspect. In baptism a process of *self-identification* with the dying and rising Christ took place, as we saw. In fact, it only began there, because, for Paul, it was a lifelong process (see n. 52 and chapter VII, section 5.3.1 below). Did this process have emotional repercussions that would underpin the self-image of being created anew? Let us consider the Christians' identification with Christ from a psychological perspective.[55] The latter teaches that such identification processes bring about *changes* in the psyche: the *emotions* – but also the *motivations,* and the *behaviour* – of those who identify with another person are indeed restructured.[56] The emotional, motivational, and behavioural changes that come with identification processes helped further to increase the plausibility of the self-image 'I am a new creation.'

From a psychological view, the early Christian assertion of being 'renewed' represents an ontological statement: something in the personality is 'really' altered and rebuilt. At this point an early Christian and a modern psychological concept are compatible. From the perspective of the constructivist meta-level, however, such ontological statements are in principle impossible. Each supposedly ontological proposition is merely a building stone in our construct of reality. But there, in the constructed building of reality, the being 'renewed' is something real: it is an intersubjectively shared reality.

[55] I attempted this in P. Lampe, 'Identification with Christ: A Psychological View of Pauline Theology', in T. Fornberg and D. Hellholm (eds), *Texts and Contexts* (FS L. Hartman; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 931–43, especially 937–41.

[56] Ibid., esp. 937 and 941, with recourse to psychoanalytical literature. Interestingly enough, Paul, when speaking of the process of identification in Romans 6.3-4, discovers changes in behaviour (6.4b: ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατεῖν).

Furthermore, it strongly affects the behaviour of those who nurture this self-image (see section 5 below). Because not just you, but everybody in your social environment is convinced that you are a 'new creation', you also act according to it – or you lose face.

4 The Eucharist

4.1 Chains of cognitive constructions

4.1.1

Like in baptism, cognitive combinations created the meaning of the Eucharist. Once again the discovery of similarities constituted the starting point, similarities between (A) the ritual of *breaking* bread on the one hand and the physical *breaking* of Christ on the cross on the other; (B) between the *communal* drinking of wine from *one* cup on the one hand and the new *covenant* founded by Christ on the other. What was similar was related to each other.

Accordingly, the oldest literary tradition of the last supper available, the pre-Pauline *paradosis* in 1 Cor. 11.23-25,[57] reads:

> In the night in which he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after having given thanks, he broke [the loaf] and said:
> '*This* signifies[58] my body, which [is broken] instead of you;
> *do this* in remembrance of me.'
> In the same way [he] also [took] the cup after supper, and said:
> '*This* cup signifies the new covenant [which is grounded] in my blood;
> *do this*, as often as you drink [from it], in remembrance of me.'

The repetition of 'this' (τοῦτο) four times at the beginning of each statement begs for comment. The first τοῦτο is related either to the bread or more likely to the *act* of breaking the bread and giving thanks. The second τοῦτο ('*do* this!'), which picks up the first, speaks in favour of the second solution.

The same argument holds for the Lukan version, which is dependent on the Pauline tradition. In Lk. 22.19, the first τοῦτο can be related well to the *act* of giving thanks and breaking bread – for the same reason as in Paul. Jesus 'took bread, gave thanks, broke, gave to them, and said: "This (that is, the giving

[57] In this framework, the discussion about how the historical Jesus interpreted his last supper with the disciples can be omitted.

[58] Or 'is'. On the meaning of ἐστίν as 'signifies/means' in allegorical equations, see, e.g., Gal. 4.24; Mk 4.15-16, 18. Because there is a clear parallel between 1 Cor. 11.24b and 11.25b, this second possibility is more accurate. In 11.25b, the cup of the last supper 'is' not the new covenant. Rather, it 'signifies' or 'points to' it. Also in the previous chapter in 10.16, ἐστίν is used even twice as 'signifies'; in this passage there is no identity ('is').

thanks, breaking, and distributing of the bread) points to (= symbolizes) my body, which is about to be given for you (on the cross); *do* this (the giving thanks, breaking, and distributing of the bread) in remembrance of me."' Not only 'do this' but also 'he gave' and 'given', which correspond to each other, increase the focus on the act, and not on the element of bread.

By contrast, in Mk 14.22, τοῦτο is unambiguously related to the bread. The added 'take' in Mark leaves no doubt about this. Correspondingly, 'do this' is absent. Whichever way, in each case broken bread and the dying body on the cross are linked in a first cognitive combination (A).

In a second cognitive association (B) the chalice, which stands for the communal drinking from one and the same cup, that is, for an act expressing fellowship, is interpreted as signifying God's new covenantal fellowship with the Christians. In this early stratum of the tradition, the bread saying and the cup saying still stand asymmetrically beside each other. The cup of wine does not yet signify the blood of the crucified Christ but the new covenant, which was established *because of* the blood shed on the cross.

The asymmetry of the two sayings corresponded to the original liturgical situation in which the bread saying and the cup saying were not yet recited together but were separated by a complete nourishing meal (1 Cor. 11.25 μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι; the δεῖπνον was the principal meal of the day).

4.1.2

Not until later liturgical development were the two sayings brought in line with one another. The Gospel of Mark (14.22-24) reads: 'This is (*or*: signifies) my body . . .; this is (*or*: signifies) my blood of the covenant.'[59] No longer was the act of communal drinking from one cup interpreted as referring to the covenant, but in a third cognitive combination (C) the wine distributed in the ritual was interpreted as referring to the 'blood of the covenant' shed on the cross. At the latest by the time of Justin in the second century, the process of paralleling the two sayings had been completed. Now it said only 'This is my blood'; the covenant had moved completely into the background (Justin, *Apol.* 1.66.3).

The similarities between the respective *interpretandum* and the *interpretans* rendered the three cognitive constructions plausible to the early Christians ('evidence by congruence').

4.1.3

Two further cognitive associations (D, E) have been implied until now, without us exposing them. How did the early Christians get the idea of introducing the motif of the covenant into the Eucharistic formula? As 1 Cor. 10.16 shows, the cup could have been simply interpreted as 'fellowship'

[59] Both translations are possible. See the previous note with respect to Mk 4.15-16, 18.

with one another or with Christ. Why 'covenant'? Here also a discovery of similarity got the construction process off the ground.

The *death of the innocent Jesus* was reminiscent of the *death of the innocent sacrificial animals* in Israel's cult (D).[60] And once this analogy was detected, a fifth association (E) could emerge, as soon as early Christian scribes bent over the scroll of Exodus. The connection of the motifs *blood of a sacrificial animal/covenant* existed in the tradition (Exod. 24.8).

(a) According to Exodus 24, animals were slaughtered for the festival at Mount Sinai and offered not only as a burnt offering (עלה), but also as a *peace offering* (זבחים שלמים). As was customary in Israel, the sacrificial community ate the meat of the animals slaughtered for the peace offering; God was satisfied with the blood and pieces of fat, and in this fashion participated in the fellowship meal.

(b) The character of the peace offerings as *fellowship meals* may have been the reason that early Christian scribes focused on Exodus 24 when pondering the *fellowship meal* that Jesus had celebrated with his disciples, letting them drink from one cup during his last supper – the latter was unusual for Jewish meals and therefore needed interpretation. In any case, it was possible to discover a similarity here (F, fellowship meal), which stimulated cognitive constructing.[61]

(c) Once Exodus 24 had caught the scribes' attention, they only needed to read further. Here they found material that set this particular event at Mount Sinai *apart and above* all other peace-offering fellowship meals in Israel and thus allowed it to be placed in relationship with the *unique* Christ event and its *unique* fellowship meal (similarity G).

What was so unique about the peace offering at Mount Sinai? Moses took unusual liberties in this festival in not offering to God *all* the blood, as was mandatory,[62] but merely sprinkled the altar with half of the collected animal blood. He held back the other half – breaking a taboo. Then he read out the commandments of the covenant between God and Israel, and sprinkled the other half from the vat of blood on the people and shouted: 'See the blood of

[60] Cf. 1 Cor. 5.7: Christ was 'offered' as the 'paschal *lamb*'. The paschal parallel suggested itself because of the temporal coincidence of Passover and crucifixion.

[61] By contrast, the flesh of the atonement sacrifices was never consumed. It was taboo (Lev. 4.3-21; 16.23-28), and the idea of fellowship was absent from these sacrifices. For this reason, the Lord's Supper was never interpreted in the light of the sacrifice of atonement. Also the text of 1 Cor. 11.24 (τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, my ' body' broken 'for you/in your place') does not allude to the atonement sacrifice but to the (non-sacrificial) *idea of vicarious representation* in Isa. 53.4ff., 12. On this and on the often overrated significance of sacrificial categories in Pauline soteriology (Rom. 3.24-25; 1 Cor. 11.25; cf. 5.7; contrary to widespread opinion, *not* the numerous ὑπέρ formulas), see P. Lampe, 'Human Sacrifice and Pauline Christology', in K. Finsterbusch, A. Lange, and K. F. D. Römheld (eds), *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Suppl. Numen 112; Leiden/Köln: Brill, 2007), 191–209.

[62] Cf. also Deut. 12.24.

the covenant that the Lord makes with you' (Exod. 24.8; statement E). In this exceptional, outrageous scene the foundation for a new relationship between God and Israel was laid. For this one time only, God and Israel *shared* the blood (= life) of the sacrificial animals. This act of fellowship set a seal on the covenant like 'blood brothers' seal their pact by sharing blood. A pact was made with blood, so that it was possible to say: the Sinai covenant was established 'on the basis of blood'. Exactly this formulation turns up again in the Eucharistic formula of 1 Cor. 11.25: ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι, 'the new covenant based on my blood'. Thus, the promise of a '*new* covenant' in Jer. 31.31 was fulfilled in Christ – and this was the last cognitive association.

Taken apart, the discussed chain of associations can be depicted thus:

Cognitive associations on the basis of similarities (A, B, C, D, F, G):

(A) The *breaking* of bread ^ the *breaking* of Christ's body on the cross
['^' = 'resembles' or in some cases also 'signifies'[63]]

(B) The *communal* drinking from *one* cup ^ making a *covenant*

(C) Wine ^ blood.

Derivation of the particular proposition that 'Jesus' blood is the foundation of a new covenant'

(D) The *death* of the *innocent* Jesus ^ the *death* of *innocent* sacrificial animals (cf. 1 Cor. 5.7)

(F) Jesus' last *nourishing fellowship meal after* the breaking of bread; the bread breaking (according to A) came to signify Christ's *death* on the cross (1 Cor. 11.23-26) ^ the *nourishing fellowship meal after* the *slaughter* of the Sinai sacrifice in Exodus 24

(G) Christ's *unique death* on the cross ^ the *unique* event of the Sinai *sacrifice* in Exodus 24.

F plus G → (H): Exodus 24 is especially suited to be paralleled with Jesus' death on the cross and the Lord's Supper.

D plus H → (D'): Jesus' death on the cross ^ the sacrificial animal death in Exodus 24.

(E) Sacrificial animal *blood* in Exodus 24 > a covenant
['>' = 'is the foundation of']

D' plus E → (D"): Jesus' blood on the cross ^ the sacrificial animal blood in Exodus 24

D" *plus E* → (J): Jesus' blood on the cross > a new covenant (cf. Jer. 31.31)

[63] The propositions A, B, B', C are special cases of this equation. In them, in addition to '^' = 'resembles', '^' also equals 'signifies', 'is a symbol for'. Not until later strata of tradition (see below) does 'is a symbol for' become 'is identical with'.

(B): The *communal* drinking from *one* cup ^ making a *covenant*

B plus J → (B'): The communal drinking from one cup ^ the making of a new covenant that is based on Jesus' blood on the cross; in short,

The cup ^ the new covenant based on Jesus' blood (= 1 Cor. 11.25).

It needs to be noted that this derivation of 1 Cor. 11.25 did not need the proposition (C) yet; not until later (Mk 14.24) did the similarity of wine/blood (C) come into play. As an alternative model, the chain could be also organized *with* proposition (C), and then (B) would not have been necessary. The similarity (B) between the communal drinking from one and the same cup on the one hand and the making of a covenant that establishes fellowship on the other might not have played a role in the process of construction. As we saw, the derivation of proposition (J) could easily be found: 'Jesus' blood on the cross established a covenant – in the same way as the sacrificial blood in Exodus 24 did.' This is the chain from (D) to (J) in a nutshell. Then – instead of similarity (B) – the similarity between blood and wine (C) would have been brought into play. From (C) and (J) someone might have deduced: since the wine in the cup can signify Jesus' blood on the cross (= C), which founded a new covenant (= J), the cup of wine signifies the new covenant based on Jesus' blood (= 1 Cor. 11.25). This was possible – albeit less logically compulsive.

4.1.4

The process of cognitive constructing did not thereby come to an end. Let us take a quick look back. It is unlikely that already in the early stage of development, the identity of the Eucharistic bread and the body on the cross would have come to mind. (a) In view of the parallel between 1 Cor. 11.25 and 10.16, it is preferable to translate ἐστίν as 'signifies'. (b) In addition, it is preferable to relate the first τοῦτο ('this') in 1 Cor. 11.24 to the *act* of breaking bread and giving thanks (11.24a), because it is picked up by a second τοῦτο, which clearly denotes an act ('*do* this', that is, giving thanks and breaking bread).[64] (c) Statements like 'Eucharistic wine signifies/is blood' can be excluded for the early stage, as 1 Cor. 11.25 shows. This means a presence of the crucified Christ in the *elements* of bread and wine was not yet envisaged. Was the last supper at first a simple meal of remembrance of the crucified Jesus, for which εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (1 Cor. 11.24-25; 'in my remembrance') could be an indication? The breaking of the bread reminded of his death on a cross, drinking together from one cup reminded of the covenant instituted at that cross.

[64] The parallel verse 11.25c ('do this') focuses likewise on the liturgical *act*, in this case on the taking of the cup and giving thanks, which in 25a are elliptically absent, but need to be added from verses 23-24, in order for verse 25a to obtain a predicate.

Nonetheless, very soon, at the latest by the time of Paul himself, an interpretation emerged that not only focused on the remembered past, but also claimed a special *presence* of Christ – albeit *not* a presence of Christ in the *elements* of the meal. There is no doubt that early Christians living in a Hellenistic environment – such as Paul and the Corinthians – were convinced by what has been called the resurrected Lord's '*real presence as host*' during the Eucharistic meal:[65] The exalted Christ was personally present in the *pneuma* (Spirit) as *princeps*, as lord of the table and host, so that the meal was eaten in fellowship with him. The *pneuma*, which 'dwells in you' (1 Cor. 3.16), was identical with Christ (2 Cor. 3.17). Accordingly, the presence of the *pneuma* was the presence of Christ, who hosts the meal.

Paul in 1 Cor. 10.21 formulates correspondingly: 'To drink the cup of the Lord . . . to partake of the table of the Lord'. More importantly, each liturgical leader of the Eucharistic meal imparted the impression that Christ himself distributed bread and wine when he or she spoke the Eucharistic liturgical words of 1 Cor. 11.24-25 in the *first* person ('my body', 'my blood', 'in remembrance of me'). In view of the presence of the Spirit, this was not mere rhetoric for Paul. Also according to the typological *midrash* in 1 Cor. 10.1ff., the Eucharistic participants eat and drink nourishment that 'belongs to the Spirit (= Christ)' or 'is given by the Spirit' (1 Cor. 10.3-4; πνευματικόν).[66]

In the Hellenistic environment, participants in pagan cultic meals held similar opinions. In the second century CE, for example, Aelius Aristides wrote about the Serapis cultic meals: The god Serapis is present in the midst of those who gather in his name and bring food for the sacrificial meal. Serapis himself is considered a table companion, the host, and leader of the sacrificial meal.[67]

4.1.5

To follow the trail of the next cognitive construction, we need to introduce an idea that was important for Paul. For the apostle, the exalted Christ can never be contemplated apart from his crucifixion. As long as the eschaton has not come yet (1 Cor. 11.26d), the exalted one remains at the same time always the crucified one for all Christians. The Greek perfect tense in ἐσταυρωμένος ('the one who was and is crucified') in 1 Cor. 2.2 (cf. Gal. 2.19b) imparts the idea well: whenever Christ is proclaimed, it is not as someone whose death was left in the past (aorist), but as someone whose past death qualifies the

[65] 'Prinzipale Realpräsenz'. Cf. on this concept H.-J. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), 373–74.

[66] See further in section 3.3.

[67] Aelius Aristides (Sarap. 54.20ff.; ed. by Dindorf); on this in more detail P. Lampe, 'Herrenmahl', 196–197 with notes 40, 49. In 1 Cor. 10.18–22, Paul himself draws a parallel between the Lord's Supper and pagan cultic sacrificial meals.

present. With this idea Paul criticized the Corinthian enthusiasm, which was interested exclusively in the exalted one, and in contrast thought it could leave the cross behind as something that had been overcome (cf. 1 Cor. 4.8).

Combining this thought with the concept of Christ's '*real presence as host*' in the Eucharist, Paul held that to eat the last supper in fellowship with Christ inevitably meant to enter into table fellowship not only with the exalted, but also with the crucified Christ.

Consequently, Paul formulated in 1 Cor. 10.16 that, in the last supper, the believer comes into *fellowship with the crucified* Christ. Such a focus suggested itself all the more because already the pre-Pauline Eucharistic tradition had emphasized the death on the cross (1 Cor. 11.23-25). Accordingly, in 1 Cor. 10.16 Paul's formulations turned out to be: the cup 'signifies fellowship (*κοινωνία/koinonia*) with the blood of Christ'; the bread 'signifies fellowship with Christ's body' on the cross.

An alternative translation of κοινωνία would be '*participation* in the blood of Christ', and correspondingly 'participation in the body of Christ'. However, the immediate context speaks against this. In 10.20, κοινωνοί can only mean 'people who are in *fellowship with* demons', because those offering sacrifices to demons do not have a share in demons – which would be nonsense – but rather they participate together *with* demons in the sacrifices that are offered to them, which leads to a *fellowship with* demons.[68]

Paul likewise emphasizes the death on the cross in 1 Cor. 11.26 when he summarizes the pre-Pauline Eucharistic tradition in his own words: whenever Christians consume the Eucharistic bread and drink from the one cup, they 'proclaim' Christ's death and make it become present.[69]

To sum up, because the risen Christ is present as the crucified one, whoever participates in the Eucharistic meal not only enters into *koinonia* (fellowship) with the risen Lord who hosts the supper, but also into fellowship with the crucified Christ. Christ's death thus becomes present in the ritual. That is, by means of the ritual, the difference in time between Golgotha and the sacrament is set aside: Golgotha is made present.[70]

[68] Paul holds that pagan sacrifices are offered not to gods, as pagans who offer these sacrifices intend, but de facto to demons. See further P. Lampe, 'Die dämonologischen Implikationen von I Korinther 8 und 10 vor dem Hintergrund paganer Zeugnisse', in A. Lange, H. Lichtenberger, and K. F. D. Römheld (eds), *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 584–99.

[69] For Paul, 'proclaiming' is a powerful act of making present. According to 1 Cor. 1.18–2.5, when listening to the apostles' proclamation the hearer is confronted with the power of the event itself that is proclaimed. Paul's preaching represents the death of Christ so effectively that *in* these words the power of the death on the cross, which either saves or – if rejected – condemns the listener, becomes present and changes the existence of the hearer.

[70] The same held true for the sacrament of baptism in Rom. 6.3-8, as we saw above: in the ritual of baptism, the one who is baptized *dies together with* Christ. The mystery cults were also familiar with the concept that the destiny of a deity can be made present in the ritual. They, however, fostered a different, cyclic understanding of time.

Christ's presence in the *elements* of bread and wine, however, is not yet expressed. To be sure, in 1 Cor. 10.16 – differently from the pre-Pauline Eucharistic tradition – cup/blood and bread/body already stand in parallel, but the cup does not yet 'contain' Christ's blood (1 Cor. 11.25); neither is the bread considered to be the body. 1 Corinthians 10.16 does *not* say yet: 'The cup . . . is it not the blood of Christ? The bread . . . is it not the body of Christ?' Moreover, according to Paul the pre-existent Christ *administered* to Israel what they drank in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10.4) – for Paul a typological foreshadowing of the Eucharistic drink; this drink thus established fellowship with him as the donor, but the drink was not *identical* with the pre-existent Christ. The conception of Christ as being present as host of the meal, who blessed the eating participants with his fellowship and who was thought of above all as the one who was crucified, reflects Paul's view better than that of Christ's presence in the *elements* of the meal.[71]

4.1.6

Since the death of Christ was made present in the Eucharist, Christ's selfless love that culminated in this death (Phil. 2.5-8) was made present as well. Therefore it was an absurdity when richer Corinthians during the Eucharistic meal did not behave according to this love of Christ that applied without discrimination to everyone (1 Cor. 8.11). The richer Corinthians did not care when poorer people went hungry during the nourishing meal of the Eucharist – a scandal in Paul's eyes.[72] In the Eucharist, the love of the crucified Christ was perceived and experienced *again and again* by those who got involved in these constructions of meaning – and in their ethical implications. In other words, those who let the poorer go hungry during the Eucharistic supper prevented them from perceiving Christ's love. They thus sinned against Christ (11.27).

4.1.7

How did the concept of the crucified Christ's presence in the *elements* of bread and wine finally emerge? It is echoed, at the latest, in Jn 6.52-58,[73] and it possibly already appeared in Mk 14.22, although this is not clear (see above). How could the equation *Eucharistic bread = crucified body* come about?[74]

[71] Against, e.g., Klauck, *Herrenmahl*, 374.

[72] 1 Cor. 11.17ff. unfolds the ethical implications. On the structure of this text's argumentation, see Lampe, 'Herrenmahl', especially 209–13.

[73] In a stratum before redaction. The final redactor distanced himself from this materialistic understanding by spiritualizing it: 'The Spirit gives life, the flesh is useless. The words that I [= Jesus] have spoken to you [in the previous verses] are Spirit . . .' (6.63). That is, these words must be understood metaphorically, symbolically, not literally. By contrast, in the second century Justin appears to have accepted the materialistic understanding (*Apol.* 1.66.2).

[74] Since for *Paul* (1 Cor. 11.24) this equation and with it the reading 'this *is* my body' did not come into question, for the reasons mentioned, Christ's sacrificial death cannot be *repeated* in the ritual either: Christ died on the cross 'once for all' (Rom. 6.10). The sacramental act

A last cognitive construction was necessary. It combined the idea of 'the crucified Christ is present during the Eucharistic meal' (see 4.1.5 above) with the correspondence between broken bread and broken body on the cross, formulated in the pre-Pauline tradition in 1 Cor. 11.24 (see proposition A in 4.1.1–3 above). The result was logical: Christ's crucified body was conceived as being present in the broken bread. The bread became identical with the body on the cross.

Furthermore, in view of the progressing parallelization of the bread saying and the cup saying in the liturgical development (see Mk 14.24 and Justin *Apol.* 1.66.3 above), it was consistent that also identity – and not only symbolic similarity – of the Eucharistic wine and the blood poured out on the cross was asserted.

At this last step in the process of constructing reality, therefore, there was no shrinking back from the violation of a taboo:[75] the taboo of consuming a human being. Religious rituals often play with the *fascinum* of the fire, the scandalous, without getting scorched. The ritual breaks taboos in a socially acceptable way, so that a socially harmful violation of taboo does not occur outside of the ritual – similarly to the Roman Saturnalia as one among many examples: once a year masters and slaves changed roles. Rituals *stabilize* the codex of social norms by *breaking* norms in a controlled way. It is difficult to say whether this paradox developed a dynamic in respect to the Eucharist – as soon as the elements were interpreted as identical with Christ's body and blood. Did the weekly Eucharistic ritual stabilize the norm not to 'devour' other human beings aggressively, metaphorically speaking? There is no way to verify this. At least at its origins the ritual had the character of a fellowship meal, that is, of a meal that possessed the socially beneficial potential to *reduce* aggression. But often this potential was not realized, especially not when the character of a social fellowship meal was forced back in favour of a one-sided emphasis on fellowship with Christ. Paul already criticized the Corinthians for this error.[76]

4.1.8

Is it possible to draw a hermeneutical conclusion? The Eucharistic doctrines of the denominations offer a wide range of interpretations from a simple meal of remembrance all the way to transubstantiation. They all base themselves on reference texts in the New Testament canon. The wealth of ecumenical Christianity thus mirrors the heterogeneous, rather inconsistent wealth of the canon, and in this way the canon does *not* canonize every denomination's desire to be 'right' with its respective doctrine, it rather canonizes a variety and a juxtaposition, which – in light of the fellowship character of the

simply allows this death to be made present.

[75] Cf. on this G. Theißen and A. Merz, *Der historische Jesus* (2nd edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 384–85.

[76] 1 Cor. 11.17ff. On this in detail see Lampe, 'Herrenmahl'.

Eucharist – should develop into a reconciled cooperation: into a togetherness in which all come to the same table, even though they hold partly different constructs of Eucharistic reality in their minds. Perhaps at some point the denominations will be able to agree on a lowest common denominator: that the Spirit, which is identical with the exalted Christ, is present during the meal and establishes fellowship among the participants. A quotient with a lowest common denominator does not deny the individual the right to multiply the numerator and denominator in the fraction by another factor that allows him or her also to accept an additional model of Christ's Eucharistic 'real presence'. Multiplying the numerator and denominator by another factor does not change the value of the quotient!

For Paul (1 Cor. 11.17-34), in any case, the '*that*' of the presence of Christ and the *ethical implications* of the ritual were by far more vital than nosy investigations about the 'how'. For him, the function of the presence was more important than its how: Christ participates in the table fellowship of the Eucharistic congregation as saviour and judge (11.29-32) judging those who do not realize the ethical implications – not those who dare to think differently from others in respect to the 'how'.

As early as in the New Testament writings of the first century a breathtaking variety of colours emerged, which should be understood not as a deficiency but as a wealth. The New Testament canonized diversity – and this should produce a theological result that is more far-reaching than the different denominational branches have been prepared to admit so far. The canonical variance in respect to the '*how*' of Christ's Eucharistic presence forces the conclusion on us that the '*that*' alone is important. The grassroots people of the church have known this for a long time. Perhaps in the next thousand years the churches will allow themselves to be led by this simple insight and gather around one Eucharistic table in reconciled diversity. The congregations around the communion table are allowed to be as colourful as the book that lies on it.

4.2 All sources of evidence

We have observed that the early Christian unfolding of the constructed Eucharistic reality rested on relatively complicated cognitive constructions, conclusions, and combinations based on Scripture, especially Exodus 24 (cognitive source of evidence). Once categories of perception were given with such positings of reality, these allowed for having experiences in the ritual: With their senses the participants became capable of *experiencing* the presence of the crucified and risen Christ when eating and drinking elements that signified him and his destiny; the fellowship with him became *perceptible* when eating and drinking together in a communal meal of which he was considered the host. Again not only cognitive construction but also sensory perception produced plausibility for a construct of reality. Furthermore, that

in this fellowship ritual strong *emotions* were aroused (agape fellowship among another and with Christ who gave himself 'in our place') must not be especially emphasized. At the same time, evidence was produced by *social confirmation*; the latter was an inevitable result of the fellowship character of the ritual.

5 New Orientation of Behaviour

On the basis of our model (chapter V), it was possible to predict that the behaviour of the participants in a context is oriented anew as soon as the axiomatic foundations of the social context are laid down and the context is further differentiated.

In our historical material, this prognosis has been confirmed in many places. Already the axiom itself steered behaviour on a new course (chapter VII, section 1.4). The construct of equality affected behaviour in the congregational gatherings (chapter VII, section 2). In 1 Cor. 11, Paul expounded ethical implications of the Eucharistic conception (chapter VII, section 4): the constructed Eucharistic reality motivates loving behaviour among the participants.

Also the self-concept of a transformed 'I' ('new creation', chapter VII, section 3) produces consequences in behaviour. Whether or not this image of the self represents ontic reality is of no interest from the constructivist perspective. We saw that in the constructed building of reality, the 'new creation' *is* something real. And as a self-concept assured in a ritual, it triggers renewed behaviour.

All the examples illustrate that behaviour is lastingly changed not by means of imperatives, but by means of alterations in the constructed building of reality. Let us dwell for a moment on the 'new creation' in baptism.

5.1 The indicative of constructed reality versus imperatives

The interpretation of the baptized self as a renewed 'I' triggers new ethical orientation even more clearly as soon as it is linked with two additional units of content during the progressing differentiation of the context: with *sarx* ('flesh') and with *harmartia* ('power of sin'). The *sarx* is subjugated to *harmartia* to the extent that there is no *sarx* without sin (Rom. 7.18). What does the cognitive linkage look like? The pre-Pauline context of meaning affirmed that in baptism Christians die with Christ and are buried with him, and are raised from baptism to a new existence with Christ. This pre-Pauline construct was enriched by Paul, if not before, with *sarx* and *harmartia*. And then it meant for him and for the Christianity shaped by him that (a) in baptism the *sarx* of a human being dominated by the power of sin dies with Christ. Galatians 5.24 speaks of the 'crucifixion' of the *sarx*; Rom. 6.6

of the 'old human person' being 'crucified with' Christ, 'so that the body possessed by sin might be destroyed and we no longer serve sin'. Admittedly, the physical body as such does not die; however, the power of sin to hold this body in slavery comes to an end. (b) In Rom. 6.2, Paul formulates more precisely: 'We have died *to sin*' (cf. also Rom. 6.11; 7.6), and in this way are set free for radically changed behaviour in comparison with our pagan past (1 Cor. 6.9-11; Rom. 6.4, 7, 11-14, 22; Gal. 5.16-26 and more often). 'New creation' here means for Paul that, in the creative act of baptism, God empowers the Christian to behave in new and better ways.

As we remember, *within* the building of constructed reality such talk – in the indicative mood – about a new moral capacity of those who are baptized is no 'illusion' or mere rhetoric. Even in contemporary psychologically describable reality, it is possible to assert that a process of identification with another person – like that experienced in baptism – leads to *changes* in the psyche: emotions, motivations, and behaviour are restructured, without having to be helped along with imperatives (see chapter VII, section 3.6 above). This holds especially when the mental model of the self is intersubjectively shared in the community. Then all are convinced that here someone has been renewed in baptism. As a result, the newly baptized member of the community behaves all the more according to this mental *and* social reality.

Why then are imperative formulations still needed – as for example in Rom. 6.12-13 alongside indicative verb forms? Why is it possible still to observe that early Christians even after baptism often enough acted 'sinfully'? (a) Paul, assisting with imperatives from verse 12 on, held the Roman Christians accountable to the new self-image bestowed in baptism. All sources of evidence stabilized this self-concept (see chapter VII, section 3 above). But now and then it also needed to be supported by imperatives lest it be lost – imperatives of this kind: 'Honestly, have the courage to consider yourselves a transformed person who can act in renewed ways! Take this new self-image seriously!' This is precisely what Paul writes in verse 11: '*Consider yourselves* (λογίζεσθε ἑαυτούς) dead to sin!';[77] this concept of the self has not yet taken root in you satisfactorily! The imperative endeavoured to strengthen the self-image that had been conveyed in the indicative mood. The imperative thus had the same stabilizing function as the sources of evidence, although it itself did not produce evidence. (b) However, even if a self-image is firmly rooted in a person ('I am set free from the power of sin'), it never translates into corresponding behaviour without '*friction loss*' (see above), so that an imperative push always remains necessary. Imperative and indicative mood do not contradict each other; they supplement each other.

[77] The text variant 'consider that you yourselves are dead to sin' (ℵ, B, C, etc.), even better attested in the manuscripts, has the same meaning.

Both factors ('a' and 'b') contributed to the fact that Pauline Christians often still behaved in accordance with the old, pre-baptismal social context (= κατὰ σάρκα). By way of example this became especially obvious in 1 Corinthians 6, where Christians sued other church members in pagan courts or called on courtesans. No one in the pagan Corinthian context frowned over such actions. Expressed in the categories provided above: in their new Christian social context some Corinthians still retained the old one as a second, mental context in their mind, so that it could entice them to action. Paul's imperative formulations can therefore be interpreted as demands to turn off the old, second mental context and to give oneself over entirely to the new context intersubjectively shared by the Christians.

Analogous examples for the harmonious interplay of indicative and imperative ways of speaking can be found easily. A self-image conveyed to a student ('music is in your blood!') certainly motivates this child to take practising seriously, but only in rare cases does it make the parental imperative, which steers against the '*friction loss*', superfluous ('practise, practise!').

5.2 Constructed reality in performative and descriptive modes of speech

With the help of these examples, 'constructed reality' can be put in relationship to 'performative speech' and 'descriptive speech'. Performative speech carries out a creative act. Whenever Queen Elizabeth dedicates an ocean liner with the words, 'I christen you in the name of England,' then *what* she says happens *by* her saying it. By contrast, the speech of the radio reporter on location, who portrays the christening of the ship for the listeners, is descriptive.

A constructed reality can be verbalized in both modes of speech – performative or descriptive – depending on the situation. 'We have escaped from the power of sin' represented at first a cognitively constructed context in the mind of an early Christian theologian such as Paul. This mental context of meaning became a social one, as we saw, when it was made public and binding for others, becoming intersubjective. Whenever Paul preached to a newly founded congregation, 'We are set free from the power of sin,' he announced a mental context by means of a *performative* proposition that endeavoured to impose this subjective context onto the mental contexts of his listeners and thus onto the social context of this congregation. Not until he succeeded in doing this did this statement begin to *describe* a constructed social reality. To speak performatively, from a constructivist perspective, thus means to advance a subjective, mental context to the status of an intersubjectively shared reality, whereas 'descriptive speech' depicts a constructed social reality. This description, however, has nothing to do with saying anything about ontic reality.

Praise in education, for instance, communicates to a person a model of the self and to this extent is performative speech ('music is in your blood'). On the other hand, if praise only verbalizes what is obvious for everybody

present, then it is descriptive speech ('Mr Bernstein, today you have again conducted beautifully'). Of course, even in this description, a performative spark glows, because if descriptive acknowledgements stopped, even famous conductors would lose confidence.

Reality as a construct in the brain can never be detached from our language (be it regular or mathematically formalized language), and even if at times we think in visual or auditory images, these correspond to terms in our language. To speak performatively means to verbalize a reality construct with the intent to turn it into an intersubjectively shared reality ('You are a renewed being'). If this endeavour proves successful, certain behaviour is prompted.[78]

5.3 The ethos resulting from Paul's theology of the cross

We observed that the Corinthian enthusiasts did not develop the pre-Pauline baptismal construct (Christians die with Christ and are raised with him in baptism) in the same way as Paul did.[79] Paul unfolded its *second* half ethically (Rom. 6.4): baptized individuals exit the ritual as persons who are raised in the sense that they are empowered for better behaviour. They do not yet experience an eschatological immortalization.

Moreover, Paul also unfolded the *first* half of the pre-Pauline baptismal construct into another direction. He developed from it his theology of the cross in order to temper the Corinthian enthusiasm. This theology of the cross defined Christians as being crucified with Christ – not only in baptism, but lastingly during their entire post-baptismal existence: as 'participating in his sufferings', 'becoming like him in his death' (Phil. 3.10), 'carrying in one's own body the death of Jesus' (2 Cor. 4.10; Gal. 6.17), and being 'crucified with Christ' permanently (Gal. 2.19). The Greek perfect tense in Gal. 2.19 captures that being crucified with Christ in baptism (aorist in Rom 6.6) qualifies the post-baptismal life of the Christians in a lasting way.

What consequences for the ethos result from this? (a) On the basis of congruence, Paul cognitively linked his distressing experiences as an itinerant apostle, summarized in the *peristaseis* catalogues,[80] with the pre-Pauline concept of baptism ('crucified and buried with Christ') and thus interpreted them positively: an apostle suffers his tribulations *together with Christ*. Christ's sufferings on the cross manifest themselves in Paul's own existence. Such a construction of meaning made it easier to bear painful experiences and to accept distressing situations more willingly.[81]

[78] In the doctrine of justification, God's justification is also conceived of as performative speech: God 'tells' you that you are justified and in this way creates reality – as every decision of a judge does. The new reality then leads to consequences in behaviour.

[79] On the Corinthian position, see chapter V above (with notes 11–12).

[80] 2 Cor. 4.7-12, 16-17; 11.23b-33; 1 Cor. 4.9-13 et al.

[81] In addition, readiness to suffer was also motivated by a comforting promise to the suffering apostle who identified with the crucified Christ: as Christ did not remain in death, so in

The ethical potential of Paul's theology of the cross, however, is not exhausted at all in readiness to suffer. An entire spectrum of aspects opens up. (b) An apostle crucified with Christ does not rule but serves (1 Cor. 3.21-22), proclaiming the one who was crucified 'in fear and trembling' (1 Cor. 2.1-5), so that the form of preaching corresponds to the content of the message. An apostle forgoes making a show of his own wisdom (1 Corinthians 1–4), of his rhetorical skills (1 Cor. 2.1-5), or of his own spiritual power (2 Cor. 12.1-7 and more often). 'Let the one who boasts, boast only in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1.31 with Gal. 6.14), not in himself or herself. A preacher characterized by weakness is a place in which God's strength can shine forth (2 Cor. 4.7; 12.9; cf. 13.4); the preacher's weakness opens up space for God's power.

(c) This ethos of the preacher runs parallel to the ethos of the theologian discussed in chapter VI: God cannot be 'domesticated' by the fragmentary theological endeavours of Christian thinkers or theologizing 'Jews and Greeks' (1 Cor. 1.22ff.).[82] The Christian theologians' existence under the cross implies that they can never presume to define God in ultimate ways; otherwise God would no longer be a sovereign God who remains free to diverge from what theologians think (see further chapter VI, section 1 above).

(d) Humans cannot proudly recommend themselves (καύχησις) in front of God. With empty hands, being stripped of everything that they proudly could display, they face a God who accepts them solely by grace.

The Pauline doctrine of justification can be described as *one* application of Paul's theology of the cross; the latter overarches the other sectors of his theology. Paul quotes Jer. 9.22 ('Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord') characteristically both in the framework of his theology of the cross (1 Cor. 1.31; cf. 2 Cor. 10.17) as well as in the frame of his theology of justification (Gal. 6.14a; Rom. 3.27-31). With respect to receiving salvation, the idea of being 'crucified with' Christ is concretized as: the human being is stripped of everything that he or she could proudly present to God in self-assertion. Only in this way does it hold that God justifies by grace alone. Boasting about oneself (καύχησις), relying on pious achievements as a way of proving oneself to God, is taken away as an option. Salvation is unconditional. God's justifying does not build on anything originating in the human being. Being crucified with Christ causes discontinuity between the old and the new person – like every death (see chapter VII, section 1 above).

the eschatological future the suffering Christian will be caught up in the glory of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6 et al.). Paul even describes a guarantee for this: the presently comforting and renewing Spirit of the exalted Christ is a pledge of this future (2 Cor. 1.22; 5.5).

[82] On the structure of the argumentation in 1 Cor. 1-4, see P. Lampe, 'Theological Wisdom and the "Word about the Cross": The Rhetorical Scheme in I Corinthians 1–4', *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 117–31.

Just as humans do not earn their salvation, so they also do not possess it. Salvation, given by the sovereign God and made present in the Eucharistic sacrament, is not at the disposal of those who stand under the cross. At any moment it can slip away as long as the eschaton has not come yet (1 Cor. 11.26-34). No one can rest self-satisfied on the cushion of being elected (Rom. 11.21ff.; 9.6ff.). The Christians' cross existence, marked by the eschatological reservation, is again characterized by an inability to grab hold of what is God's. We saw the same with respect to the cross existence of the theologian (see 'c' above).

(e) If the eschatological 'not yet' holds for existence under the cross, the Christian is directed back to the world and to responsible existence *in* it. Paul attempted to bring the enthusiasts in Corinth, who imagined that they were already immortal in the present, back to earth. Over against their one-sided highlighting of the vertical fellowship with the Lord, Paul emphasized the horizontal fellowship among people (1 Corinthians 11; 12–14). The Corinthians had only the vertical Christ relationship in their minds when celebrating glossolalia as the highest good without translating it for others (1 Corinthians 12–14).

With regard to interpersonal interaction, existence under the cross for Paul manifests itself in *selfless love*, that is, in disregarding one's ego and its interests, which were crucified with Christ. Someone who is endowed with special gifts like glossolalia, for example, ought to use them to invigorate the community instead of building up her or his own self (1 Corinthians 12–14). Someone whose ego is puffed up does not love (13.4). A love that follows the selflessly loving crucified Christ puts aside its own interests in order to give itself to others (Phil. 2.5-11; Rom. 15.1-3, 7 et al.).[83]

For Paul, agape, as an expression of being conformed to the crucified Christ, translates into these concrete terms: voluntary limitation of one's own freedom in favour of those who are weaker (1 Corinthians 8–10; Romans 14–15), in favour of the sanctity of the community (1 Corinthians 5), or in favour of Christ, who could be offended by our behaviour (1 Cor. 6.12-20).[84] It translates into voluntary limitation of egocentric self-display and of building up oneself so that others can be built up (1 Cor. 12–14; 11.17-34; the 'fool's speech' in 2 Cor. 11.1–12.13: renunciation of displaying one's

[83] Philippians 2.4 is text critically uncertain: 'Let each of you look not to your own interests but [also] to the interests of others.' The reading in brackets is better documented in the manuscripts; however, a reading without the brackets presents the *lectio difficilor*. If the last is original, the commandment to 'love your neighbor *as yourself*' (Mt. 22.39) is radicalized. We here need to leave aside the hermeneutical problems that come with such a radicalization of the love commandment. Hermeneutically seen, to neglect one's own interests entirely in favour of other people did not prove to be psychologically healthy in church history. It often bordered on exploitation – especially of women.

[84] For Paul, the *freedom to renounce one's own freedom* is the highest freedom if it is done in the service of agape.

own charismatic powers); voluntarily giving up one's rights to the benefit of opponents (1 Cor. 6.1-11; cf. Mt. 5.44) or of congregations (1 Corinthians 9); finally, renunciation of asserting one's own position at all costs: instead of pushing through his own position, Paul allowed his addressees the freedom to choose between alternative actions (1 Cor. 6.1-11; 1 Corinthians 7).

For Paul, such agape possessed an eschatological quality. Anyone who experiences it catches a faint glimpse of the substance of the eschaton, because agape is one of the few goods that will still continue to exist in the eschaton (1 Cor. 13.13).

5.4 The contrasting Corinthian ethos based on a different anthropology

The Corinthians developed the pre-Pauline baptismal concept differently and accordingly oriented their behaviour differently. They linked the pre-Pauline construct with the anthropological dichotomy between the physical body on the one hand and a mind-soul centre of personhood on the other, a dichotomy familiar to them from their pagan past. Therefore, they could assert that their immaterial centre of personhood 'rises' in baptism insofar as it receives salvation, immortality, and intimate fellowship with the Spirit of the exalted Lord in this ritual, whereas the body remains excluded from this process, indeed falls into meaninglessness and is heading towards eternal nothingness. This construction led to the ethical conclusion that what happens with the physical body in the short time span before the eschaton is irrelevant. It is trivial whether or not the body takes its pleasure in incest (1 Corinthians 5), with courtesans (1 Corinthians 6), or with meat offered in pagan sacrifices (1 Corinthians 8). All that counts is the immortalized nucleus of the 'I'.

6 A Look Back: Jesus of Nazareth's Proclamation of God's Kingdom in Words and Works

At the conclusion of chapter VII, the thread of thought from chapter VII, section 1 needs to be picked up again:

(A) the axiom supporting the entire early Christian context of meaning was: 'God raised Jesus as the first one of all the dead to be raised in the eschaton.' Developing the axiom, the early Christians concluded that the end-time events had visibly (ὤφθη) begun at Easter, and that the ultimate revelation of God and God's kingdom – as well as the raising of the rest of the dead – were imminent.

(B) Before Easter, Jesus for his part had proclaimed an immediately imminent dawn of the eschatological regime of God, and still more that it was already visible here and there, that is, in Jesus' own works in Galilee.

(A) and (B) together suggested the conclusion that not only in Jesus' works but also in the Easter event this proclamation of Jesus was visibly (ὤφθη) fulfilled. The raising of one person showed that God's approaching regime had definitely begun at this place, that it had thus drawn significantly closer on its way to humankind, and that nothing was lost with the crucifixion: at Easter *God kept the promise Jesus had made*. God, the Sovereign One, committed God's self to this Jesus of Nazareth and his proclamation, so it seemed, confirming by means of the act of resurrection what Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee had previously proclaimed about God (see chapter VII, section 1.5 above).

In this early Christian reality construct, Jesus thus became a figure in whom God had revealed God's will and intention in an especially clear way, a figure in whom God therefore must have been especially present. It makes no difference with which traditional Jewish linguistic appellation this special majestic position of Jesus was verbalized ('Son of God', 'Son of Man', 'Anointed = Messiah, Christ', etc.). In every case the new content burst open the old title (a *crucified* 'Son of God', a *humble* 'Son of Man', a *weak* 'Anointed'), so that the choice of the individual terms did not really matter, but rather their common vanishing point: the special presence of God in the sayings and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. This section will examine these words and works at their pre-Easter stage.

What was the historical Jesus' image of God? It comprised more than only the announcement of the near arrival of God. But because this individual element of Jesus' proclamation appeared to have been confirmed by the act of resurrection, Jesus' *entire* image of God seemed to have been proven true – a conclusion *a minore ad maium*. Again, what was Jesus' image of God, which to post-Easter Christians appeared to have been validated by God's self?

Second, the question needs to be raised why Jesus' proclamation of God was plausible to a *pre-Easter* audience. What convinced the men and women who became his pre-Easter adherents? By what means did it become evident to them that reality – including the reality of God – was to be seen the way Jesus pictured it? To what extent were particularly Jesus' *parables* capable of producing evidence for Jesus' design of reality? We will give special attention to the parables of the historical Jesus and by way of illustration investigate one of them from a constructivist angle, without, however, being able, within the limits of this study, to take into thorough review the manifold problems of historical Jesus research.[85]

6.1 The reality of God as Jesus pictured it

With the message of the *basileia of God* ('royal regime of God'), impressively expounded particularly in the parables, Jesus of Nazareth opened up an

[85] For an introduction into the problems, primary texts, and secondary literature, see, e.g., Theißen and Merz, *Der historische Jesus*; Becker, *Jesus von Nazareth*.

aspect of God's image for contemporary Galilean men and women with which they previously had not been confronted in such a manner. As will be seen later, this proclamation urged them to make a decision.

Jesus of Nazareth worked as a constructor of a new reality, of a (in several aspects) new counter-reality to the world of experience of contemporary Palestinian people. He preached the imminent – indeed already incipiently present[86] – dawn of the reign of an *unlimitedly loving* God who turns towards human beings, especially to the lost and weak, who defies the boundaries of distinctions and exclusions that humans have put in place, and whose compassion is unconditional. The Nazarene lived and acted on the basis of this constructed reality. And he presented it so convincingly that not only he but also many adherents began to orient their behaviour and their hopes for the future towards this reality of a loving God who invalidates human boundaries.

6.2 Sources of evidence

Let us inquire about the sources of evidence that made this proclamation of the kingdom of God plausible to the contemporary audience so that they stuck to his heels and oriented their own construct of reality towards his message.

6.2.1 Sensory perception and emotional experience

Evidence through sensory perception and through emotional experience emerged whenever the Nazarene practised what he preached: he himself turned to the lost, despised, to the social outsiders, the unclean, and sick; he ate with them; as a charismatic, he brought about healings in their psyches and bodies (in whatever way these miracles are to be explained – psychosomatically or not – such healings by him were not purely legend); he confidently disregarded human social boundaries – and at the same time he proclaimed that *in* all of these deeds none other than God was at work and incipiently had begun to build up a new kingdom (e.g. Lk. 11.20 from the pre-Lukan sayings source Q, or the parable of the mustard seed, Mk 4.30-32). In these deeds of Jesus' everyday life, his adherents experienced with their own senses what kind of blessings they could hope for on a much larger scale in the near eschatological kingdom. Here hope was instilled (emotion). Here they could touch with their hands and joyfully experience (emotions) what was supposed to come on a much grander scale soon. Furthermore, besides undergirding his proclamation with corresponding deeds, Jesus put his message into the poetic language of parables. Their poetry was apt to be more memorable and to grasp people's emotions more effectively than plain speech.

[86] Present in Jesus' own works. See below for Lk. 11.20, for example.

In contrast to a number of Jesus researchers,[87] I do not see compelling evidence that the historical Jesus considered the royal reign of God purely a *present* entity, which ruled the growing egalitarian community of small artisans, fishermen, and peasants founded by him, thus spreading the reign. These scholars have a hard time explaining (a) how and why the numerous references to a kingdom still *to come* found a way into the Jesus tradition and, more importantly, (b) why these references, if they all together were created by the early church after Jesus' death, are not more strongly spiced with apocalyptic details than they actually are. The early church after Jesus' death nurtured an ardent imminent expectation of Jesus' eschatological return (cf., e.g., Mk 9.1 with 1 Thess. 4.15-17) and thought in apocalyptic categories. (c) Here the biggest problematic knot comes into play: in the historical development, Jesus stood between his teacher John the Baptist, who was apocalyptically minded and anticipated an imminent final judgement, and the early church, which nurtured apocalyptic expectations of an imminent end. Only Jesus himself allegedly threw the future-eschatological categories overboard. Historians, whose task it is to make *developments* plausible, will have trouble making even two discontinuities in this line of development look believable.

6.2.2 Social confirmation

Evidence through social confirmation arose automatically the more Jesus' adherents grew into the 'Jesus movement' and the more settled people in the villages supported the wandering followers of Jesus. The fact that not long after the crucifixion over 500 Jesus adherents gathered together (1 Cor. 15.6) gives at least a hint of the size of the Jesus movement.

Admittedly, the Nazarene, as is well known, also ran into disapproval, indeed rejection in the form of death on a cross, with the result that his followers not only experienced social confirmation but also unsettling condemnation. This means that at times sources of evidence other than social confirmation had to flow powerfully if Jesus' design of reality were to survive.

6.2.3 Cognitive construction as a result of hearing Jesus' parables

Evidence through cognitive construction arose for his Galilean audiences when, for example, *in his parables* the Nazarene surprised his listeners by linking elements from the religious tradition with motifs from the everyday Palestinian world of experience, without commenting on these combinations. After hearing these parables, the listeners were left to their own interpretations without further explanation. On their own they had to make sense of what they had heard by starting *their own* cognitive constructions. They themselves had to create sense from his words by combining motifs from the traditional theological language

[87] Cf., e.g., J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 1993); J. D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco/New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995); J. D. Crossan, *The Essential Jesus: What Jesus Really Taught* (San Francisco/New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

of Israel (God, kingdom, etc.) with images from Jesus' parables taken from the everyday world of Galilean life in order to determine what these parables might tell them about themselves, about Jesus, and their own life in Galilee – seen in the light of the arrival of God and God's royal reign.[88]

By being put into contact with Galilean everyday life, traditional religious motifs, especially the idea of 'God's royal reign', were made accessible to the listeners and thus gained plausibility.

6.2.3.1 The *basileia* of God in the tradition before Jesus

The mighty 'royal reign of God' moving world history was well known to the Galilean hearers as a religious concept from tradition:

(a) God rules as King from Zion (e.g. Isa. 52.7-8) not only over Israel, but also over the world (e.g. Pss 99.1-2; 93). For many authors in the Hebrew Bible, this reign was manifest both in the *past* as well as in the *present*. In the past, God gave proof of this royal rule, for example in the liberation of Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 15.18-19). In the present course of history, God proves to be the king ruling the world by sheltering Israel against enemies (e.g. Ps. 44.5-9), carrying out 'mighty deeds', and by giving, with the fruits of the earth, to all people 'their food in due season' (e.g. Ps. 145.1, 4-6, 11-13, 15-16, 21b). God also rules by implementing God's law in Israel and producing allegiance to the Torah (e.g. Deut. 33.2-5; Ps. 99.1, 4, 7), so that in Israel God's royal reign becomes evident in a particularly clear way (e.g. Exod. 19.3-6; Deut. 33.5), although in principle it pertains to all the world (e.g. Pss 47.3, 8-10; 96-99; 103.19-22).

(b) Of course, the more often empirical experience questioned the existence of God's reign – for instance traumatic experiences such as the demolition of the temple or the exile of parts of the people of Israel – all the more statements about a *present* kingdom of God faded into the background, and all the more its *future* coming, even in the imminent future, was expected (e.g. Isa. 52.6-8; Mic. 2.12-13; 4.6-8; Zeph. 3.14-15; Zech. 14.9, 16-17; *Testament of Daniel* 5.13; *Jubilees* 1.27-28). When Israel is liberated in the eschaton, so pious Jews believed, God's royal rule will be manifest for all.[89] Jewish apocalyptic circles, who perceived God as being remote in the present time and accordingly only rarely talked about a present reign of God, thought of God's rule almost exclusively as an entity of the end time, breaking in from transcendence and bursting the framework of the present world (e.g. *Ascension of Moses* 10.1-10; Dan. 2.44 with 12.1-4).

[88] As the formulations above indicate, the 'content half' and the 'image half' of a parable overlay each other. A simple dichotomy, with which A. Jülicher (*Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, I–II [2nd edn; Tübingen: Mohr, 1920)] heralded the start of modern research on the parables, has long been abandoned in scholarship.

[89] Cf., e.g., *The Eighteen Benedictions*.

This is most likely the point where Jesus picks up the traditional thread. He had himself been baptized in the Jordan and thereby demonstrated that he – at least at the time of his baptism – agreed with the apocalyptically oriented proclamation of John the Baptist.

(c) Nonetheless, even in an apocalyptic framework from time to time there could be talk about the presence of the divine royal rule (e.g. Dan. 4.34; 1 QM 12.7). And as early as Second Isaiah the idea was formulated that seeds of God's new royal reign in Zion, expected to come in the near future (52.6-8), can already be perceived in the present: 'See, I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?' (43.19). Here it was assumed, in the same way as in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, that in the present time a seed grows up that only in the (near) future will develop into the great and new that God has in mind for the world. Propositions about the present and the future complement each other without tension.

In short, Jesus of Nazareth took the idea of *God's royal rule to be expected in the near future* from tradition. In addition, the fact *that statements about the presence of the divine reign could stand alongside others about its future character* could also already be observed in the tradition.

(d) Furthermore, the belief that God is a king of 'great goodness', 'patience', 'compassion', and 'mercy' existed in the tradition (Ps. 145.1, 7-9, 11-13), a king who lifts up the oppressed (145.14), feeds every living creature generously (145.15-16), gathers the lame and the outcasts (Mic. 4.6-8), and from Mount Zion gives bread to the poor abundantly (Ps. 132.13-15). Essential characteristics of Jesus' portrait of God and of the proclamation of the *basileia* tied to it were already coined in these and similar statements. The question arises how Jesus of Nazareth was able to bring such traditional motifs home to his Galilean hearers so effectively that they accepted them as relevant for the blueprint of their own lives. Was he a hermeneutical artist? Well, at least he was a poet:

6.2.3.2 The parable of the leaven as a case in point

For Jesus' Galilean hearers, up until this point, God's mighty royal reign moving world history and leaven from the kitchen had had nothing to do with each other. On the contrary, leaven was perceived as ritually unclean. Now, however, the Nazarene proclaimed that the royal rule of God was like leaven. How hare-brained! How surprising, and how facetious – if a joke grows from combining two elements that normally have nothing in common. Can we hear the Palestinians laughing? 'God's royal rule is like leaven that a woman took and hid in fifty pounds of flour until all was leavened' (Lk. 13.21, from Q). To Galilean ears this sounded ridiculous at first.[90] The sublime 'royal rule of

[90] As if we were to rant: 'God's sovereignty is like the muffler of a moped that smells up the entire street.'

God' is associated with cultically unclean everyday trivialities – with a dough trough and a tiny bit of unclean leaven, which in spite of its meagre amount transforms the taste and texture of an entire tub of dough.

The Galilean hearers had to ask themselves: does the choice of images signal that God's royal rule is going to make its way even into the daily routine of the little people, 'leavening everything and all', indeed touching the lesser ones too? By choosing this image and thus joining the mighty with the trivial and profane, Jesus *does* exactly what he asserts about God: that by 'leavening all' God's royal reign is able to join even with the most remote and profane, and radiates its power into the last nook and cranny, even to where the Galilean hearers of the parable putter around in their everyday world. Thus (a) Jesus' action of provocatively connecting the unclean and profane with the divine and (b) God's action of spreading God's royal reign to every corner of the world, according to the parable's content, run parallel.

The power of fermentation is emphasized by the amusing exaggeration of the amount of flour. Fifty pounds of flour represent an enormous amount that the poor woman would have to tackle, far more than anyone normally kneads at any one time. Yet still 'all' of the flour is leavened. In their reflections on the parable, the Galilean hearers, in a cognitive construction, have to conclude that they too, in their hilly Galilean backcountry, can be grasped by God's royal regime when they open themselves to it. It is not only for scribes, for religious elites who speak Hebrew. No, the mass of flour is bigger, more comprehensive!

By surprisingly connecting the mighty reign of God with the trivial world of the Galilean hearers, Jesus lends special power to the parabolic saying so that (a) the hearers get involved in the narrative world and begin to search for their place in it. If Galilean hearers find themselves in the parable (as a tiny lump of flour in a gigantic mass) and begin to ponder the story, they can then take (b) a second step in also combining that the might of God's royal rule not only consists of moving world history with 'thunder and lightning', but that first of all it consists of being able to reach even *them*, the insignificant people, the people of the hinterlands in their everyday world. *This* is the might of the minute quantity of leaven – not that it triggers explosions in the village oven, but that it spreads its taste to the last tiny particles of the immense mass.

(c) In the third place, in further reflections a Galilean will realize that God's rule – at least initially – does not emerge with visible splendour, not with something sensational, but that it works *invisibly*: kneading the dough 'she *hid* the leaven in fifty pounds of flour' until it was no longer visible. But nevertheless, it began to work powerfully. This means, superficially seen, at first nothing changes in Galilean everyday life when God starts up God's rule there and human beings get involved in it. There will still be threshing, baking, ploughing, and trading in the market. No one 'sees'

God's kingdom making its way. At first the world remains outwardly just as it was. But nonetheless, the story assures, the Galilean listener may be confident that the God proclaimed by Jesus, with whom he becomes involved, works powerfully in him and in others who open themselves to Jesus' proclamation.

(d) In the fourth place, on the basis of the partial congruence of the two parables, a woman might also include Jesus' parable of the mustard seed in her cognitive constructions. Both the leaven and the mustard seed stand for something small, inconspicuous, that nevertheless develops penetrating power and produces a mighty effect.[91] Thus, if God chooses what is small for the starting point of God's mighty kingdom, for example the place where the Palestinian woman who listens to Jesus lives, then this does not need to appear absurd or to make her disheartened. No, both images encourage her to look optimistically and with anticipation into the future: Even though the kingdom's beginnings with me are meagre, even though my listening to this Nazarene and my acting now are only of modest rank, none other than God is at work here with me and will let something prodigious grow out of it – if the promise of the parabolic pictures is right. Those who get involved in these parables enter, according to their own understanding, into the future-oriented story of God's royal rule, into a story that is heading towards a goal that has not yet been reached ('the mustard seed grows into a tree'). On reaching this goal, God's royal rule will encompass the world in a powerful way visible to all (Lk. 13.19b; Mk 4.32b).

We see how the parable of the leaven was suitable for arousing a process of reflection in the hearer and for provoking a *series* of cognitive constructions, which fathomed the potential of the text. Over against older parable research in the footsteps of Adolf Jülicher, more recent parable research has emphasized correctly that Jesus' parables move towards not only *one* point of comparison between image and what is 'meant' (in the parable of the leaven, for example, towards the power that 'leavens' all as the one point of comparison between leaven and God's royal rule). Rather, other elements of the narrative world – the enormity of the mass of dough, the hiddenness of the leaven – also motivated the listener to draw out lines into the referent world, without creating a full-blown allegorical interpretation of each individual feature.

'God's royal rule' was linked to the everyday world of the Galilean insignificant people. Thus, the insight could mature that the *basileia* affected exactly them, and indeed was moving towards them. *Cognitive constructions* such as those expounded above could convince them of Jesus' construct of reality (evidence from cognitive construction), *although* their *sensory*

[91] Luke 13.18-19, 20-21. As can be seen here in Luke 13, later tellers of Jesus' parabolic stories liked to put similar contents (congruence) into one text. See also, e.g., the lost denarius and the lost sheep in Luke 15, or the Galileans who were killed and the Jerusalemites who were victims of an accident in Lk. 13.1-5.

perceptions only offered them relatively little – in any case no triumphal, grandiose powerful entrance of God for all the world to see. This means that even though sensory perception produced only little evidence (for Jesus' adherents his exorcisms, for instance, produced some) and even though evidence from social confirmation was at times lacking when Jesus had to face hostile environments, Jesus' construction of reality ('the kingdom of a loving God has drawn very close; it starts already here and now and with you – incipiently like a shabby mustard seed, but later it will be fully grown') was not abandoned by many, not by at least 500 Palestinians (see above). Rather, this construct was accepted on the basis of *evidence from cognitive constructions* triggered by Jesus' proclamation, especially his preaching in parables.

(e) In the fifth place, in reflecting further the hearers could perhaps include the role of the parable-telling Jesus himself in their cognitive constructions, because sooner or later they must have asked: 'Can I really depend on these encouraging parabolic images? What authorizes this Nazarene to portray God's royal rule in ways different from what we Palestinians are accustomed to? "The kingdom of God is like (unclean) leaven . . ." – who could talk about God in such a presumptuous way? Does someone speak here with a divine commission? And if the answer is yes, could it then not actually be, as Jesus claims (in, e.g., Q-Luke 11.20), that *in* his seeking us out and *in* his story telling, as well as *in* his healing and turning to us, especially *in* his exorcisms (sensory perception, see section 6.2.1 above), this royal rule of God draws near to us, so that it is on the threshold and we need only to open ourselves to it by getting involved with this Jesus? Would this interpretation not *correspond* to the insight already gained on the basis of the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed (evidence from congruence) that God's royal rule does not come to us with splendour, but inconspicuously, only with hidden power – that is to say, *in* this plain, homeless, but charismatic itinerant prophet from Nazareth, who has the dust of the roads on his feet?'

Such and similar *implicit* Christological thoughts, cognitive combinations, must sooner or later have arisen in those who had become involved with the proclamation of Jesus.[92] Anyone who did not do this and therefore turned away could only claim that a fraud was at work here who *arrogated* to himself to define God and God's rule in new ways and who consequently lacked divine authority. In fact, there was only the choice between these two constructs of reality: either Jesus was a charlatan or he

[92] Here we see that for those who had already become involved with such *implicit* Christological ideas before Easter, it must have been even easier after Easter to attribute a majestic status to Jesus (on the latter see chapter VII, section 1.5 above) – even though before Easter Jesus had never *explicitly* claimed such a position. Merely his prophetic claim to be able to say something authoritatively about God's reality can be documented before Easter.

acted with God's mandate. There was no third option. Anyone who was not for him was against him (Lk. 11.23; 9.50).

Let us summarize briefly. Jesus' parabolic sayings sought out Palestinian listeners in their everyday lives. His narratives most often caught the audiences by surprise by linking traditional units of content like 'God' and 'God's royal rule' with the Galilean world of experience, so that hearers in the Galilean hill country could sense that they themselves were spoken to and accept such concepts of the tradition anew, possibly interpreting and appraising them anew, in any case integrating them into a context of meaning.

It was important for this kind of reception process that Jesus' parables only gave the stimulus for a series of cognitive combinations and constructions that the hearers *themselves* had to carry out. In just this way these parables gained a special persuasive power (evidence from cognitive construction). The hearer 'believes what he thinks he discovered *himself*', observed Quintilian. 'The auditor . . . flatters his *own* acumen, and . . . accepts his *own* achievement approvingly.'[93] Jesus' parables in *this* way gained plausibility and moved people to follow the Nazarene.

Furthermore, evidence from sensory perception arose for those who recognized (see the fifth cognitive construction above) that the kingdom of the living God, about which the parables spoke, had already begun to be present *in* the parable teller himself, *in* his words to the insignificant people, *in* his healing and turning to them (implicit Christology). Such sensory experiences, made possible by categories of perception that were based on cognitive combinations, were suitable to increase the plausibility of Jesus' design of reality.

7 Prospects

7.1 Consequences for the historiography of theology

The historical examples could easily be enlarged upon and multiplied. An early Christian history of theology would emerge that, from the perspective of a constructivist sociology of knowledge, observed the unfolding differentiations of the early Christian context of meaning and thereby attempted to pay attention to the sources of evidence that were effective in each differentiation. In this way, a historiography of theology would

[93] Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 9.2.71, 78.

become possible that – *within the limits of what is ascertainable from our historical sources* – would also take into consideration:

- the particular experiences, sensory perceptions (they were dependent on categories of perception that should be described),
- the emotional experiences, and
- the social relationships (evidence from 'social confirmation')

of the subjects who constructed reality, that is, it would take into consideration the 'situation' of the subjects, be it a situation of persecution, or another political, emotional, cultural, social, or economic situation. History of theology would then be written not only as a history of ideas or as a history of traditions. It would also not be reduced to a constructivist analysis of cognitive constructions. A constructivistically oriented history of theology would still be all of this, but in addition it would take into consideration all other sources of evidence that influenced the process of constructing reality. Such a historiography of theology would be multi-dimensional.

7.2 Hermeneutical consequences

7.2.1 Consequences for ecumenism

We observed in our selection of examples how at times various groups developed the early Christian context differently and how accordingly controversies among representatives of diverse developments came about. Our constructivist approach results in a hermeneutical consequence: pursuing unity of the churches could mean (a) to learn to discriminate more clearly between axioms and their differentiations, (b) to focus even more strongly on the common axiomatic foundation, and accordingly to relativize the differences between the denominations as differentiations from this foundation, as well as (c) happily to embrace the pluralism that arose from differentiations, because the ecumenical players can be assured that they share the axioms and *thus* are united. We concretized this by way of the Eucharist example (see section 4.1.8 above).

A constructivist perspective could be healthy for ecumenical pursuits insofar as separating differences would have to be clearly marked not only as differentiations from shared axioms. Moreover, at each differentiating step in the unfolding of the context, the effective *sources of evidence* that led to this differentiating step would have to be disclosed as well. In this way, the reasons for the separating distinctions would emerge even more clearly, and the – possibly explosive – question would have to be asked whether or not the sources of evidence, which formerly allowed particular differentiations to appear plausible, still well up today, or whether some propositions for which the sources of evidence have nowadays dwindled should preferably be abandoned or be categorized as less important, that is, as not destroying

fellowship. If, by way of example, traditionalists hold onto a proposition only because it was set in the tradition (for example, 'God does not call women to the priesthood'), it should be asked whether mere evidence from social confirmation – Christians confirm the tradition to each other – offers a sufficient basis further to swing this proposition as one of the cudgels to maintain schisms between churches.

7.2.2 Hermeneutics as not only a cognitive but also a holistic undertaking

From a constructivist perspective, the task of hermeneutical theology would be to make plausible that from the biblical heritage a load-bearing pillar can be built for the construction of subjective and intersubjective reality. How can elements of meaning from the past be reactivated and be woven into contexts of meaning today? Trying to fulfil this hermeneutical task, Protestants have concentrated on the cognitive level as the classic playground of hermeneutics.

Evidence from *cognitive construction* arises, for example, when concepts from the tradition are expressed in the language of today's people; when 'sin', for instance, is translated as 'distance from God', as 'orientation to oneself at the cost of love for others and for God', or as 'an attempt, to make oneself likeable to God by proudly pointing out one's own respectability, instead of, like the lost son, throwing oneself in God's arms with all the brokenness of one's own being'. In such translation attempts, several elements of meaning are combined with one another. And plausibility emerges if a translation blends well into the recipient's linguistic world.

Often elements of knowledge that resemble one another are combined cognitively – for example, when a Christian patient in a hospital correlates his own suffering with the crucifix on the wall of the room and thus associates his lot with Christ's passion. Perhaps he then begins, like Paul, to interpret his suffering as a manifestation of the cross of Christ in his life ('bearing the death of Jesus in my own body', Gal. 6.17; 2 Cor. 4.10). In a process of identification (see above), he then conceives of himself as, so to speak, crucified with Christ, feeling a special closeness to Christ and at the same time drawing hope from this identification, the hope that he will not only be caught up into Christ's passion but also into his resurrection and glory. As a result, his own martyrdom no longer appears to him as totally meaningless. Such cognitive combinations would be an interpretation of the cross of Christ that touches a person's present – similar to the hermeneutical process that we tried to outline for the Galilean women who heard Jesus' parable of the leaven. The hermeneutical principle is the same in each case.

The example, however, shows that the plausibility of the sentence 'I bear the death of Jesus in my own body, and therefore my suffering is not senseless but eventually will lead to something positive' not only stems from mere cognitive constructing that combines resembling units of knowledge into a new context of meaning. The plausibility also stems from emotional

experiencing: from consolation, hope, or feeling of closeness to Christ. Thus, the convincing power of cognitive work rests also on the flow of other sources of evidence. A heritage from tradition becomes plausible to individuals not only on the level of the mind, but also on the basis of as many sources of evidence as possible. For the time being, let us outline only what sources of evidence groups or individuals de facto rely on without yet asking the normative question as to whether such processes of gaining plausibility are to be approved of or not.

Evidence from *social confirmation* and from *emotional experience* arises when the individual subject allows herself to be enticed out of the shell of private religiosity and experiences participation in Christian fellowship as something emotionally positive. The less other humans socially confirm the central biblical contents to the subject and the less church life turns out to be emotionally attractive, the less relevant the New Testament appears for the present-day construction of reality.

Evidence from *sensory perception* (which is frequently emotionally charged) arises when New Testament contents become capable of being experienced because categories of perception and fields of experience are made available: when we perceive *God's love* because people lovingly turn to us in Christ's name, for example. Many people experience *God's nearness* in the ritual performances of the sacraments: 'taste and see how gracious the Lord is' (Psalm 34) states one liturgical element that accompanies the last supper ritual; it appeals to several sense organs. *Release from guilt and freedom for a new beginning* may be experienced in the ritual praxis of confession and penance or in the ritual of adult baptism. Many perceive the *Spirit of God* in charismatic events such as glossolalia or prophecy, which are understood as divine gifts of grace. It is not by chance that at the present time the charismatically shaped manifestations of Christianity are spreading at previously unknown growth rates around the globe. In such fields of experience, which are often institutionally stabilized and ritually developed, New Testament contents become perceived by the senses. In this way, the traditional contents are transferred into the subject's present construction of reality.

Anyone wanting to bring their own design of reality home to others will keep the *entire* range of sources of evidence in view. They will have a chance of winning over others if they testify about how these sources are flowing for them personally and invite others to experience these sources for themselves. If something like this succeeds, if the others are persuaded, this does not mean of course that 'truth is proven'. How we are to talk about the concept of truth in a *normative* way will be our concern in chapter VIII. There we will step out beyond the New Testament horizon, which encircled chapter VII, and – as in the first chapters – once again pose epistemological questions.

7.3 *A final note on the concept of revelation*[94]

How is the theological concept of revelation to be defined after all? Whenever the heritage of the biblical tradition becomes plausible to people, so that they use it as an important pillar for their own construction of reality, then – from a theological perspective – it is possible to speak about a *revelatory* event: in this successful appropriation of the tradition the subject is able to experience God's nearness. The reception of the tradition (privately or in public worship), the process of reading, hearing, or remembering, mediates the presence of God to the subject.

The concept of revelation thus outlined focuses on the reception process, which influences the contouring of one's own reality construct. Revelation, the experience of God's presence, results from hearing or reading. It occurs when during the process of constructing reality biblical contents are appropriated.

If 'revelation' is defined in this way, then it cannot denote a static possession of truth; it cannot be sealed forever in a system of propositions. Then there is no *depositio fidei* once and for all, but a repeatedly renewed self-involvement in the multi-faceted biblical tradition – in a continuing process of appropriation, which constantly influences and also corrects the constructed reality of Christians. If such influencing takes place, then the biblical texts, which document past generations' experiences of God, become a place where God manifests God's self to the readers. The texts then affect the readers existentially. Images of God from the past are transformed into representations for the present.

It has become clear that the concept of revelation cannot serve as an epistemological starting point. Only subjects who have already experienced that the reception of the biblical tradition shaped their own construction of reality can *in retrospect* envisage this breathtaking process as 'revelation' – as an experience of God and of God's making God's self known. Only someone who has already integrated God into her construction of reality is able to use 'revelation' as a category for herself. And only she is able also to label the testimonies of past generations about *their* experiences of God as self-revelations of God. In this way she appropriates the traditional category of 'revelation' to herself and uses it as a building stone to fit into her contemporary house of constructed reality.

A revelation of God *in* reading and hearing, shaping one's own construction of reality, results not least of all in a renewed human self-image. Christians who are moulded by this kind of revelation of God possibly define themselves as accepted and loved by this God without ifs and buts, liberated from what is unfinished and guilt-ensnarled in their own history, gifted with new potential for life. Their identity, as they now perhaps conceive of it, is not constituted

[94] See previous considerations on the concept of revelation in chapter II, section 2; chapter VI, sections 2 and 3; chapter VII, sections 1.5 and 6; and chapter VIII.

by what they achieve, nor by their 'image', that is, by what others think of them in constructed images, but by a God who turns to them, liberating them to love.

The past-time biblical images of reality do not hang in a museum behind bulletproof glass. It is not rare for them to develop a momentum of their own in the present and sweep away their audience with them. The viewers are then drawn into the landscape depicted by the images, so that they forget the epistemological museum around them. What for them has become real begins to have its effect.

Chapter VIII

Rather *intellectus intellectui concordet*[1] than *ens intellectui concordat*?[2] Normative Reflections on the Concept of Truth and on Intercontextual Competition in a Pluralistic Society

In chapter VII, we used the theoretical tools developed in the previous chapters to *describe* the unfolding of the early Christian context. In the historical material we saw that reality is not constructed arbitrarily. Is it possible to move from the descriptive to the normative? What conclusions are to be drawn from chapters II to VI? How do we deal with the concept of truth in a normative way?

1

As long as we think of 'truth' in terms of a theory of correspondence – in the sense of 'human conceptions are in accord with ontic reality' – and as long as we are humans in history, we are never able to state the 'truth' of propositions (= linguistic building stones in the construction of reality), because in the *hic et nunc* the divine Archimedian point is denied to us. The latter would allow us to see how well or badly our designs of reality converge with what is ontically real. If truth is defined by means of a theory of correspondence, the only thing that remains is to be satisfied that we at best live *towards* climbing the Archimedian point – towards this point of revelation. That is, as long as we think within the framework of a theory of correspondence, the possibility of assuredly stating the truth of a proposition remains a non-historical eschatological option, or to go along with Habermas, a non-historical ideal possibility towards which we only can live without reaching it in history. (Whether or not it will ever be reached outside of history in an eschaton is immaterial at the moment.)

1 'May reason be in accord with reason.'

2 'Being is in accord with the cognitive faculty.' Cf. the Thomistic formulations above.

Like a treble clef, this sober insight in our historical limitations stands as an epistemological prefix in front of *all* constructs of reality, also in front of constructs of the natural sciences, also in front of theologically oriented designs or in front of constructs that try to combine both.[3]

To be sure, on the non-epistemological level of living our lives, these designs of reality can be embraced as 'certain', because – on the level of the construct of reality, but only there – sophisticated and rigorous methods make the results of the natural sciences 'certain', or in theocentric designs of reality the concept of revelation provides 'certainty', because God discloses God's self, as it is asserted *within* the theological construct of reality and not on the meta-level of epistemology. God's self reveals the theocentric design of reality in biblical writings, so that it offers a reliable foundation for living and dying. No one, we have said, can live by epistemology alone. The same holds for the constructs of the natural sciences, which offer a reliable basis for surviving and orient us in life.

However, if we climb up to the epistemological meta-level, an eschatological reservation hangs above *all* of these constructs of reality, above those of the natural sciences as well as the theological ones: We do not know whether or not what we picture on the basis of rigorous scientific methods or on the basis of the biblical testimony is in accord with ontic reality. We only hope so; we believe it. This knowledge lies in an a-historical eschaton. Biblical authors knew that they had to be humble about their own construct of reality; otherwise they would not have moved the concept of belief to the front. They knew that what was revealed in the scriptures was only a dull image and that an actual manifestation of God was yet to appear (cf. 1 Cor. 13.12). 'Not that I have attained it, I pursue it' (Phil. 3.12). To illustrate this theological insight metaphorically, in the medium of scripture the powerful energy of God's ontic reality does not touch us directly, but only after repeated refractions.[4] But what reaches us is enough to be able to live by it.

Expressed analogously for the natural sciences, what reaches us through the thick, matted filter of our limited empirical capacities is as a rule enough for us to find our way in the surrounding (unknown) ontic reality and to survive in the midst of the dangers to our physical existence.

[3] That natural-scientific and theological constructs can complement each other and are not necessarily contradictory (as some fundamentalists maintain, manipulating instruction in the natural sciences in schools, because they are incapable of reconciling the concept of creation with evolution theory) is demonstrated by modern systematic theology at every step. From the abundance of examples see, for instance, J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker (eds), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); T. Peters, R. J. Russell, and M. Welker (eds), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[4] See further chapter VI above.

In this normative chapter, I consciously dispense with every conception of ontic truth (see chapter II, section 2.1 above). Only *propositions*[5] should be candidates for the attribute 'true'. A conception of ontic truth would obscure the conceptual clarity in today's situation. In the framework of the Platonic worldview, in which a hierarchy of being was assumed, it was meaningful to speak of the truth of being: The most real, highest being becomes the *verum* ('true') as soon as it reveals itself. Translated into theology this concept meant: as soon as God discloses God's self, God also is 'truth'. God is the 'truth' in God's self-revelation to me. Or specified Christologically, God is the 'truth' in God's self-revelation in Christ. In the Gospel of John this read as: Christ is the 'truth' in his revealing of God.

I dispense with this conception of ontic truth also because, in line with the majority of the New Testament writers, I take the eschatological reservation more seriously than the Gospel of John. The decisive revelation of God, the seeing face to face, to use biblical language, is yet to appear. In the *hic et nunc*, we merely have a multiply refracted *written* (biblical) witness of God. 'Revelation' exists in the reception of only fragile *propositions*. And their truth or deficiency can be proved assuredly only in an a-historical eschaton. For the moment, we simply believe that these statements may prove to be adequate. We hope so; we do not know.

Once again, as long as we define truth by means of a correspondence theory in the sense of an *adaequatio* of the cognizing subject and the ontically real object, the possibility of stating that propositions are assuredly true remains an eschatological, a-historical option. For the biblical tradition, this is nothing new. It is only new for naive religious zealots or scientifically oriented naive realists. For those who as historical persons fancy they 'possess' the truth, the truth – on the epistemological level – slips away like sand between our fingers. *All* are thus compelled to be modest. After climbing back down from the epistemological level to the level of day-to-day living, they will then – we can hope – treat each other's constructs of reality with more forbearance and patience. Tolerant behaviour and openness for dialogue could be the results of the sobering insights gained on the epistemological level.

2

Is it nevertheless possible to establish a proposition as assuredly true also in the present time of *historical* existence? This is feasible only if 'truth' is conceived of as immanent in the subject, *apart from the idea*

[5] = Conceptions, images, constructs of reality *put into words*. The constructed reality is always linked to language (see above).

of correspondence between human propositions and ontic reality. What would such a concept of subjective truth look like?

By saying that a proposition is true, I add this proposition to my construct of reality. *Within* the house of constructed reality itself, I thus add a second floor, a meta-level. On this level, I declare a statement to be true (or false). Meta-sentences like 'the proposition that the sun always comes up in the east is true' or 'the proposition that all ravens are black is true' represent mosaic tiles *within* my construct of reality. By means of such meta-sentences, in my everyday life, I naively state an accordance with ontic reality. And not until I step out of the house of my construct and climb onto an epistemological mountain above it do I realize that there might be quite a chasm between my constructed reality and ontic reality, and that correspondingly with my meta-sentence 'proposition A is true' I merely indicate that proposition A is entitled to belong to my construct of reality.

3

How is the concept of probability related to the concept of truth? We saw above that the concept of truth tolerates no gradations. Probability by contrast lives off these. How is the latter related to the former?

Whenever someone establishes high probability, she again adds a proposition to the house of her reality construct, attempting to ascertain the stability of individual building blocks before she inserts them into the house. Because of incomplete empirical data,[6] we are usually able to come up only with propositions that are not entirely certain even on the level of my constructed reality, not only on the epistemological meta-level. That all ravens are black is an observation of up to this point 361,786,758 specimens, but we cannot be certain that one day a white one might not fly by that has all of the characteristics of a raven except for the colour. We have not seen all of the ravens that exist. Our data are incomplete as in every induction, for which reason we will phrase our proposition better: 'The proposition that all ravens are black is *very probably* true,' meaning: 'it is true *on the premise that* our empirical data are representative of all conceivable cases, and therefore no case capable of falsification will arise'. The more black ravens I observe, that is, the 'firmer' the data become, the more the probability rises that this proposition is true. When I speak of probability, I therefore add to the statement '"*p*" *is true* ≡ *p*'[7] the information: 'At the moment I do not know with 100 per cent certainty that the fact p [all ravens are black] is actually given within my reality, but only with 90 per cent certainty.' Not until

[6] A historian may read 'source material' instead of 'empirical data'. See chapter IX below.

[7] See chapter II, section 2.2 above.

all conceivable cases are included in my empirical data pool (this is easily done with statements like 'every day of this month the sun came up in the east') will I move up to 100 per cent certainty and drop the additional probability clause.

It is important to note that with the concept of probability we still remain trapped in what is immanent in the subject ('subjective truth'), that is, trapped *within* the house of constructed reality, into which we constantly insert new building stones after having scrutinized them. Probability statements remain on the level of the construct. They express nothing about how near to or far from ontic reality we erect our construct. Humans are denied every proposition, including every probability statement, about *this* distance.

4

After all that has been said, what are the criteria by means of which truth – in the sense of subjective truth[8] – can be stated? (A) *Language immanence*. First, propositions that construct reality will be scrutinized for their *consistency* and *coherence*, that is, it will be checked if a statement is free of contradictions within itself and if it fits without contradictions into an already given system of propositions (see chapter II, section 2.3.1 and chapter V above: truth immanent in language). Furthermore, the *aesthetic* rule has normative power. It mandates that a simpler hypothesis that explains all known data just as well as a more difficult one is to be preferred.[9]

As far as the *empirical* aspect (sensory perception) is concerned, it plays a role in two places. At first it can be located within the framework of language immanence. Empirical material streaming towards us is accessible to us only as interpreted, *processed* data that are expressed in statements. The other propositions of a system must stand in a coherent relationship with these empirical statements. Furthermore, the propositions of a system ought not to contradict *any* of the tested empirical statements that are available to us but have not (yet) been inserted into this system.[10]

(B) *Empirical testing*. On their part, the empirical statements must be carefully tested. Controlled methods comprise experimental repetition, precise observation, critical comparison of witness reports, and much more,[11]

[8] See chapter II, section 2.3 above.

[9] 'Occam's razor'. For the details of the catalogue of rules, see the beginning of chapter V.

[10] See the criterion of *comprehensiveness*. For this concept, see, for example, Rescher in chapter I, note 38 above. This condition is not always fulfilled, for instance when an empirically based statement can be inserted without contradiction into only *one* of two systems that are not compatible (e.g. quantum physics and theory of relativity) and for which one 'universal theory' successfully uniting them both is still being sought.

[11] See the catalogue of rules at the beginning of chapter V. Furthermore, see the so-called syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic conditions that play a role in sensory perception; chapter V.

without such methods being able to prove correspondence with ontic reality. Nevertheless, a strict application of such methods is necessary in order to satisfy those who try to determine whether an empirically based statement can be labelled as (subjectively) 'true' or not.

Besides the criteria of linguistic immanence (A) and of sensory interaction with the external world (B), the linguistic-pragmatic criterion (C) would be available to establish truth. Applying the linguistic-pragmatic criterion means posing the question whether a proposition is supported by the de facto *consensus* of a language community (see chapter II, section 2.3.2 above).[12] However, should this criterion be normative? Is it a good guideline when we explore under which conditions humans should designate a statement as true? Doubts have to set in. To be sure, de facto the broadest possible social confirmation for a proposition is important for individuals when they accept it as true. But in the normative context it does not matter if two people or 300 accept something as true. Such a de facto process can be *described*. On the *normative* level, however, consensus is not suitable to serve as a criterion of truth. Why?

Let us consider first some basics. That humanity could ever reach agreement on a one and only mega-system of propositions is doubtful. Several systems will always compete with one another. Correspondingly, the consensus about a proposition – even about trivial statements such as 'the earth circles around the sun and not vice versa' – can most often be established only in a limited community. For this reason 'true' in historical existence will usually only be 'true for n. n. and not for x. x'. In some cases the community of consensus will temporarily even consist of only one person – when a new idea flares up at a desk at night, or when in a laboratory a new proposition is formulated. After the publication, the community of consensus will grow or shrink away to nothing because its author reconsidered after conversing with colleagues.

The question arises, how large would a community of consensus have to be for truth to be established? For different propositions, greater ('the earth is round') or smaller ('there is a God') communities of consensus will be formed; in fact, each proposition of a system will have its own community of consensus. The language community that maintains a system provides different-sized consensus groups for many propositions of the system, since not all members of the language community always agree about everything. And no doubt for every individual proposition of the system there exist those outside the language community who are quite in agreement with this

[12] We need to consider the de facto consensus, not – like Habermas – the consensus produced by a language community in an *ideal* communication situation. With Habermas's approach we would end up again at the same eschatological reservation that we described in section 1; in our historical existence we then could never designate a proposition as 'true', because the ideal communication situation is never a live possibility in history. See in detail chapter II, section 2.3.2 above.

proposition without thereby wanting to belong to the language community that supports the system. These factors make it difficult to establish the size of a de facto consensus. But how else other than quantitatively could the consensus serve as a criterion of truth?

However, even if the consensus *could* be quantified, would it then be suitable as a criterion of truth? There would be no legitimate basis to establish a mandatory number of those in agreement, a normative threshold for what is true. And even if reasonable grounds for such a threshold existed, would a proposition be falsified if the limit fell short by one person? Or even more absurdly, if three people wavered around the limit, would the truth value jump back and forth between true and false? The gradual growing and shrinking of a community of consensus offers no adequate counterpart to the binary concept of truth, which tolerates no gradation. Spread over a time line, different sizes of consensus communities form for each proposition. Should the truth content of this statement in each case also increase or decrease? This would be a theatre of the absurd.

The same holds for the pragmatic criterion of *usefulness* (D), according to which a proposition offers helpful sustenance for living our day-to-day life and thus makes *positive emotional experiences* (E) possible.[13] In chapter II, section 2.3.3, we rejected such criteria of truth as inadequate normative guidelines because what may feel positive or helpful can tomorrow be less useful or have a less pleasant effect on one's emotions. Would the truth value have to jump between 'true' and 'false' on a day-to-day basis according to my mood swings? On the scale of emotions, where would the threshold value lie that determines between true and false? Would what neither benefits nor harms or arouses neither positive nor unpleasant emotions be neither true nor false? In the normative sphere, such criteria of truth are of no concern. They are only needed in the descriptive sphere.

All things considered, the criteria of truth immanent in language (A) as well as the empirical aspect (B) remain. If these criteria are employed in a controlled way, better systems begin to distinguish themselves from inferior ones. A contest commences.

5

After we have put forward this reduced canon of conditions for truth, do we now want to set the competitive dialogue among the systems adrift? De facto, also the criteria C, D, and E will inevitably play a role in it, whether we like it or not. Must we take note of such praxis of life with a shrug of the shoulders? Or can more be established in a normative way?

[13] On other triggers of positive emotions, see chapter V, note 1 above.

No one forces us to link what is normative solely to the binarily coded concept of truth, which, as we just saw, is not suitable as a counterpart to 'consensus' (C) or to 'positive emotion on the basis of, for example, usefulness/help with life's problems' (D, E). If the exclusivity of this link is given up, it is possible to find other norms according to which the competitive dialogue should proceed among the different constructs of reality that emerge from pluralism.

5.1

All passengers in 'the same boat', in which the competitive dialogue takes place (see chapter VI, section 3 above), should first become conscious of their own proceedings and be able to give an account of the axiomatic foundation of their respective reality construct and if possible also of the methods of the development of their context. Such *transparency* should be expected at least from scientific designs of reality. It facilitates the intercontextual conversation in this boat.

5.2

Furthermore, it follows from the preceding parts – and all participants in the dialogue should be conscious of it – that none of the constructs of reality that are brought into the discourse emerged arbitrarily. Reality is neither haphazardly concocted nor can someone opt arbitrarily on the market of possibilities for one constructed reality and against another. That individuals are convinced that the world exists in one way and not in another is subject not only (if at all) to their free decision and willpower, but to the mentioned sources of evidence that spring forth differently for each person and are able to be manipulated by the individual only to a limited degree. This insight compels greater *forbearance*, if not *respect*, for the one who constructs things differently.

5.3

The considerations in 5.1 and 5.2 only provide a general framework for the contest. They do not enable us to decide about which reality construct to reject and which to accept in our life. In addition to the criteria of truth A and B, do further aids present themselves to someone who is searching for reality? If, in the normative field, the concept of the *verum* ('true') does not help us to get any farther than has been propounded, does an additional concept nevertheless present itself? Yes, there is one, the concept of the *bonum* ('good'), which is to be placed at the side of the *verum*.[14] To be sure, in the

[14] That the concept of the *bonum* is not equivalent to that of the *verum* is easily shown: between *malum* and *bonum* something neutral is conceivable, whereas no third thing exists alongside *true* and *false*. Between *malum* and *bonum* it is possible to think of a scale of gradations, which in respect to truth is out of the question (see chapter II, section 2.2 above: *vero nihil verius . . . concipi potest*).

field of the normative, the *bonum* will not render the social consensus (C) acceptable as an additional decision criterion in the contest: a *bonum* is not *produced* by majorities, it only frequently *finds* majorities, for instance in a parliament. Something is good not because a consensus exists about it; rather because something is good it frequently leads to a consensus. The concept of the *bonum* will also not make criterion E acceptable, since often what awakens positive feelings fosters the *malum* ('bad'). However, the concept of the *bonum* makes it possible for the criterion of helpfulness in life (D) to become interesting again:

5.3.1

Cognitive neurobiology considers coping with life and the ability to survive (also in a psychosocial sense) as a practical purpose of the constructing brain.[15] Brains cannot reproduce the world; it only remains for them to construct. The cerebral construct, however, serves to secure and facilitate the survival of the organism in its environment. This holds not only for humans; it holds for animals as well. The environment must satisfy some minimal requirements for the survival of an organism; it must, for example, provide possibilities for nourishment, for escaping, and for reproducing. The cognitive apparatuses of the variedly complex organisms enable interactions with the environment that safeguard survival. Important faculties of sensory perception serve to discover and obtain food or prey, to recognize members of the same species and sex partners, to protect from enemies, and to get around obstacles. It is obvious that an apparatus of perception oriented in such a way *selects*. Indeed, for humans to step through the paradisiacal gate of knowing ontic reality would be to step through a gateway to hell that endangers survival; cognizing *all* that is 'out there' would be an informational overkill. In any case, it would be irrelevant for survival. It is not important 'correctly' to know the ontically real environment, but to comprehend it in a way appropriate for living. The cognitive apparatus therefore forms hypotheses about the environment that optimize the security of life. The brains of animals of flight, to take an example, must sound *false* alarms more often than those of predators in order to achieve an optimum of security. In this respect the realities that the brain designs are never arbitrary. In each distinct way they seek to help in coping with life.

Anyone who values life as a *bonum* and correspondingly the criterion of usefulness for life will admit that one uniform and fixed design of reality cannot be equally beneficial for the lives of all people, because people live in different situations that place varying demands on coping with life. What is

[15] See G. Roth, *Das Gehirn und seine Wirklichkeit: Kognitive Neurobiologie und ihre philosophischen Konsequenzen* (1994) (3rd edn; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 21, 29, 67–69, 227.

important for surviving and living diverges from existence to existence. For Christianity this means that in the ecumenical framework the plethora of different developments of the axiomatically founded early Christian context does not present a deplorable weakness, but a helpful strength that fosters life. Seen in this way, as long as we live in history, not 'unity' in the sense of uniformity but a *reconciled* diversity of the denominations would be the goal worth striving for and not just a troublesome transitional stage on the way to unity. Uniformity would then have to be defined as an a-historical, eschatological quantity, if it is desirable at all. The analogous situation holds for inter-religious relationships: reconciled diversity would be worth striving for, not a unified world religion.

5.3.2
How do we apply the criterion of helpfulness for living? We have already seen (chapter II, section 2.3.3) that the statement 'the unfiltered discharge from my factory smokestack is harmless' in fact makes life marvellously easy for me as a factory owner but harms life in general. Thus, 'usefulness for life' will have to be determined on the basis of range of effect. Kant formulated his categorical imperative accordingly: the maxim of my behaviour should have the potential to serve as a *universal* law. Antiquity came up with the golden rule (e.g. Mt. 7.12). What matters is that a construct of reality should be able to unleash a behaviour that helps not only an individual or an individual group in coping with life, but a general public at large. Matthew and Luke speak globally about all people whom I should treat as I would want them to treat me (Lk. 6.31; Mt. 7.12), all people including enemies (5.43-48), not just group members.

This is not the place to get into a discussion about ethics. Is a reality construct's usefulness for living to be measured primarily by helpfulness to *human* life (as Mt. 7.12; Lk. 6.31 might suggest)? Ethics has its hands full in laying out the numerous ethical implications of 'helpfulness to human beings'. This criterion logically implies, for example, friendliness to creation because if the environment, including the animal world, is not fostered, over the long term humans will also suffer harm.

At this point, the implications of the criterion 'helpfulness for living' cannot be expounded further. What matters here is its capacity to supplement existing criteria of truth – without itself being a criterion of truth.

In addition to the criteria of truth A and B, we here have an additional decision criterion at hand to separate the wheat from the chaff among constructs of reality. This third criterion (D') is, however, no criterion for determining the *verum* but for qualifying the *bonum*. We thus burst open the one-sided concentration on criteria of *truth* as decision criteria and realize that the pragmatic theories of *truth* named in chapter II, section

2.3.3 chose the wrong door: They in fact had to do with the *bonum*, not with the *verum*.[16] Only in relation to the latter did they fail to produce a valid criterion.

5.3.3

If we attempt to determine the relationship of the three criteria A, B, and D' to each other, we will have to imagine three concentric circles. The outer, largest circle is occupied by A. No system will be able to be accepted that is thrown off balance by contradictions. A, therefore, represents a necessary condition for the acceptance of any system. As the next smaller circle, criterion B represents a necessary condition for the acceptance of all systems that also contain empirically based propositions. D', by contrast, represents a criterion for the rejection of systems whose harmfulness for living can be qualified. It cannot be used, however, for propositional systems that are neutral in regard to usefulness for life, that is, per se neither help nor harm life. That such neutral systems offer no *bonum* cannot stand in the way of their acceptance as long as conditions A and B are fulfilled.[17]

Taken on its own, solely A is capable of serving as a *sufficient* condition for the acceptance of systems, but only of mathematic propositional systems whose acceptance depends neither on an empirical dimension (B) nor on an unambiguous pragmatic value for living (D').

6

Let us take a look back. Late Western thinking has been quaking because of several factors – by way of example, because of the loss of the Thomistic certainty of correspondence; because of the resulting turn to what is subjective, for which constructivism and other theories opted; because of the collapse of logical empiricism; or because of deconstruction in the way of Derrida and his followers. At the dawn of this thinking, a Socrates roaming through the streets of Athens got on people's nerves by asking annoying questions. He challenged their certainties, drew them into discussions, exposed contradictions within their thinking, led them into a labyrinth of problems – and then vanished without offering new certainties. He did not possess them. But he knew it. This knowledge was the only thing that he thought gave him an advantage over others.

[16] This also holds for the multi-dimensional theory of truth of R. C. Neville (ed.), *Religious Truth: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), who, influenced by Peirce, again listed the pragmatic aspect only as a dimension of *truth* and in my opinion thus overloaded the concept of truth.

[17] If two competing systems are both helpful for living, the criterion might invite us to determine which has more pragmatic value for living.

Yet his thinking and acting did not end in nothing. It was important for him that each person 'becomes as good as possible' (Plato, *Apology* 30b). In the midst of certainties shattering, something beyond all theoretical certitudes remained certain for him: his conscience. Planted in his heart as an inner voice – he called it the *daimonion* – it urged him to do what is good and avoid the bad.[18] It even urged him to resist his friends whose whispers tempted him to steal out of the city after he had been sentenced to death; he preferred to submit to the laws of the state than to live.

At the dawn of Western thinking, Socrates shattered theoretical certitudes and emphasized the *bonum*. We today, in accordance with both of these Socratic aspects and in view of the loss of the Thomistic certainty of correspondence, switch over to a concept of subjective truth and – since the latter's criteria are insufficient – have to supplement it with a criterion of the *bonum*. Of course, at this point the comparison with Plato's Socrates plays out. Evening lies in a different light than dawn.

Let us return to our constructivist design. Up until now, it seemed as if in a construct of reality there existed only the spatial aspect of the present – and not the depth dimension of time. How about propositions that refer to the past within a construct of reality? How does historiography look in the light of constructivism? A final sketch illustrates this.

[18] For his conscience, it was self-evident which actions were good and which ones bad. Paul echoed this Socratic-Platonic (and later also Stoic) understanding in Rom. 2.14-15: 'The Gentiles, who do not have the (Jewish) law, by nature do what the law requires; they are a law to themselves . . . they show that the law is written on their hearts.' Paul also proved to be part of the wider Socratic tradition when he emphasized that theologians cannot be certain of their knowledge; that theology cannot be absolute (see chapter VI, section 1 and chapter VII, section 5.3.1 above). Theological truth can only be clothed in the garments of foolishness (1 Cor. 1.18ff.).

Chapter IX

The Prospect for a Constructivist Theory of Historiography

What could the constructivist approach deliver for a theory of writing history? I do not intend at this point to take the lid off the barrel that postmodern theoreticians of historiography have filled up after Hayden White in 1973 and 1987 had analysed the process of writing history by means of categories of literary theory. He emphasized the narrative structure of historiography, which contains a fictional element, and thus sounded the bell for the so-called 'linguistic turn'.[1] At this point, I simply extend some lines that were begun in the preceding chapters. Leopold von Ranke, one of the founders of modern source-oriented historiography, in the nineteenth century described the historiographer's task as 'to say how it actually was'. We will see, however, that this goal is unattainable. Ranke's endeavour resembles an attempt to climb to the moon with a rope.

Our constructivist approach will show that the traditional contraposition of emic versus etic historiographies, that is, of histories written from the perspective of those who participate in the culture being studied and of those not involved, is not an absolute opposition. Within the overarching constructivist theoretical framework, both can be brought into a reconciled relationship.

[1] Alongside H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), see especially G. Spiegel (ed.), *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005); E. A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); J. Schröter and A. Eddelbüttel (eds), *Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit: Beiträge aus geschichtstheoretischer, philosophischer und theologischer Perspektive* (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 2004); J. Rüsen, *Kann Gestern besser werden?: Zum Bedenken der Geschichte* (Kulturwissenschaftliche Interventionen 2; Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2003); J. Rüsen, *Für eine erneuerte Historik: Studien zur Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976); L. Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2003); H.-J. Goertz, *Unsichere Geschichte: Zur Theorie historischer Referentialität* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001); J. Straub (ed.), *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein: Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1998); K. Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997); C. Conrad and M. Kessel (eds), *Geschichte schreiben in der Postmoderne: Beiträge zur aktuellen Diskussion* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994); W. Küttler, J. Rüsen, and E. Schulin (eds), *Geschichtsdiskurs, I: Grundlagen und Methoden der Historiographiegeschichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1993); R. Koselleck et al. (eds), *Theorie der Geschichte, I–VI* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977–90); R. Koselleck (ed.), *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), and many others.

1 Emic Constructs: Second-Order Constructs of Past Constructions of Reality

As historians we at first attempt to understand how people of the past saw the reality constructed by them. Let us use once again the extreme example of 'Christ's resurrection'; it allows us to illustrate the difference between emic and etic clearly.

> [Construct of reality A] A deceased Jesus arose to life because God raised him. After Easter he therefore was able to appear to his bereaved adherents in several self-revealing visions within a limited time span. With his resurrection he assumed a place of glory at God's side. He can be called upon in prayer as *Kyrios* (Lord).

This is how early Christians understood their world. The historian, approaching this constructed reality of the Christians of that time, treats this (verbalized) design of reality like someone who reads a text and attempts to understand and describe its statements.

The constructed realities of past times *are*, as it were, 'texts' of the historian, which various past language communities 'wrote' and accepted as true. Admittedly, historians are far from having complete access to these texts because all of the minds of that time are dead (and even if they still lived, historians would not be able to get a complete read of them. These minds would no longer think exactly the same way as they did at that time; their memory would not open a direct passage to the past). Historians can, however, infer parts of these 'texts' from many individual written documents of that time, that is, from literary, papyrus, or epigraphic sources. From these individual texts, augmented by archaeological and iconographic evidence, the big 'text' of the past reality construct of an individual language community, such as early Christianity, emerges in front of the historians' eyes.

Historians must be aware, however, that the big 'text' that opens up for them is again only a construct that they *themselves* draw up – in the hope and with the claim to come upon what the people of a language community of that time envisaged as real. The big 'text' that the historians create does not exist as such in the sources. Historians present a modern concoction with many weaknesses. For example, their work is necessarily selective and thus fragmentary, without them being able to know how large the gaps are that they are not able to fill, that is, without knowing how much more differentiated, variegated, and inconsistent the ancient construct of reality may have looked than they can recognize today. Notwithstanding, naive historians would characterize their own work as a *reconstruction* of an ancient construct of reality; less naive ones as a construct of an ancient construct of reality, that is, as a *construct of a second order*.

This construct can be verified or falsified by a particular kind of empirical method: by confrontation with the individual historical sources; the construct must be as coherent with these sources as possible. This means, in an *ideal* case, the construct of the second order exhibits (a) no contradictions to the historical sources (*coherence*),[2] (b) it covers as far as possible all aspects of the sources (*comprehensiveness*), and (c) it exceeds the sources as little as possible, that is, if possible all of its parts are underpinned by individual sources. (d) These three postulates are accompanied by two additional ones: a new historiographical proposition must not only be free of internal contradictions (*consistency*),[3] but also be able to fit smoothly into the overall system of historiographical statements that have been accepted up to this point (*coherence*).[4]

What does it mean to be 'underpinned by individual sources'? In the historian's workshop, the answer is not easy; in fact it is debated for each case, because historical sources, often ambivalent, require *interpretation* by the historian. Thus, inevitably a certain imprecision emerges, which is due to the 'sensory data' of the historian and which contrasts the greater precision of the natural sciences without this contrast representing a principal, qualitative leap. The difference in the degree of precision is quantitative, because scientists also possess what is empirically given only as *interpreted* material. Only hard-boiled logical empiricists still hold another opinion (see above).

[2] This also means, for example, if two sources contradict each other, this contradiction has to surface again in the historiographical construct of the historian; not, however, in such a way that it causes a contradiction *within* the historiographical construct, but in such a way that this contradiction between sources is named as such on a meta-level of the historiographical construct – and possibly is resolved there. A special problem emerges when sources such as Cassius Dio or Luke do not portray their own period A, but when they themselves write a history of period B. Today's historians will then attempt to compare them with source material from period B and adjust them critically. In addition, they will attempt to get hold of the period B source material that Luke himself used – by applying the methods of tradition history and source criticism to Luke's work.

[3] If the sources themselves contradict each other, this does not necessarily lead to inconsistency within the historiographical construct. See note 2 above.

[4] If a contradiction is discovered, either the new proposition or an already accepted conflicting proposition needs to be dropped – depending on which of the two is better underpinned by the sources. By contrast, historiographical constructs cannot fulfil the postulate of *cohesion* (every proposition of a system is directly associated logically with at least some other propositions of the system, from which it follows that the entire system is an integrated logical network; see chapter II, note 38 above). It would be absurd to stipulate that the proposition 'In the year 333 BCE Alexander fought courageously at Issos' has to be connected *logically* (in a chain of derivations, or something similar) with another statement like 'Washington's army crossed the Delaware River at Trenton in the year 1776.' 'Logical' in this case is simply that the two do not contradict each other.

There is an analogy between historiographical work and the procedures in the natural sciences. The following aspects correspond to each other:

Data material	
Sense-data propositions, permeated by presupposed categories and not immune to theory. (They are found in reports of measurements, of observations, etc. How formalized these statements look is irrelevant.)	Interpretations of historical sources, produced within the framework of presupposed theories or patterns of thinking.
Subject area	
The ontic reality of 'nature' (which we attempt to come close to cognitively without ever knowing how close we are).	The reality constructs of past people (which we attempt to come close to cognitively without ever knowing how close we are).
Product	
A construct of reality.	A second-order construct of reality.

The alleged deep chasm between the natural sciences and the humanities does not exist. It is by degrees that we move from one sphere to the other, not by jumping over a chasm.[5]

2 Necessary Additions and Omissions as well as Critical Assessments when Dealing with Historical Sources

Admittedly, no historians of today will be satisfied with the job description outlined so far. De facto they come up with more. (a) At many points they establish cause-effect ties within their reality construct of a second order, they classify phenomena, generalize by means of induction, construct a consistent course of history and mark turning points in it, make use of numerous conclusions by analogy,[6] and much more – all of these steps as a rule are not to be found in the sources themselves but emerge as interpretative achievements of the historian.

(b) Conversely historians omit many aspects that might be found in the sources but are left for later historians to detect, who will ask other questions.

[5] Cf. how already E. Cassirer, e.g., saw the difference between historical studies and the natural sciences not in different logics of research, but in the subject areas (*Versuch über den Menschen: Einführung in eine Philosophie der Kultur* [English 1942] [Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1996], 296).

[6] These are based on evidence from 'congruence' (see above).

Guided by their particular perspectives, historians work *selectively*. To name a few examples of different perspectives of schools of historians, some write history as a sequence of political events, others,[7] using sociological categories, describe the history of societies by portraying the development of large structures and overarching regularities. Others, by contrast, emphasize historical anthropology, focusing on the individual human beings and groups and their respective worldviews and self-images, on their concrete historical conditions and peculiarities, thus counterposing historical individuality to regularities of society.[8] Others dedicate themselves to African-American, women's, or post-colonial studies, trying consciously to mould the identity of present-day groups.[9]

(c) Or, third, historians disagree with a source after having critically analysed it, assessing it as a tendentious document, for example.

Even though we grant historians these freedoms over against the sources, we *perhaps* can still maintain that they attempt to describe the world of the past in the way that the people of the past saw it themselves. Historians simply fill gaps left by the sources, or they abridge the sources or at some points alter them on the basis of critical analysis.

3 Etic Constructs of a Second Order: Consciously Deviating from the Understanding of the Past People, Reading the Sources 'Against the Grain'

The historians' liberties increase with a qualitative leap once they consciously deviate from the understanding of the people of the past (or better: from what they consider to be the understanding of a past group). Textual exegesis of the last century learned to read texts against the assumed authorial intention

[7] Such as the Bielefeld school of historians, shaped by Wehler and Kocka: H.-U. Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung: Studien zu Aufgaben und Traditionen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980); H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, I–III* (München: Beck, 1987–95); J. Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff, Entwicklung, Probleme* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

[8] Programatically, T. Nipperdey, 'Bemerkungen zum Problem einer historischen Anthropologie' (1967), in A. Winterling (ed.), *Historische Anthropologie: Basistexte 1* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 81–99. Influenced by the dialogue with ethnology and therefore in a different form, e.g., H. Medick, '"Missionare im Ruderboot?": Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte', in A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus-Verlag, 1989), 48–84. Further, R. van Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie* (2nd edn; Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2000).

[9] For a short overview, cf., e.g., L. Bormann, 'Kulturwissenschaft und Exegese: Gegenwärtige Geschichtsdiskurse und die biblische Geschichtskonzeption', *Evangelische Theologie* 69 (2009), 166–85.

– be it through psychological, sociological, existential-philosophical, or other lenses. Such a reading 'against the grain' already begins when events of the past are evaluated on the basis of their later effects, or when they are connected with elements of knowledge that were not available to the people of the past, as is the case in a proposition such as 'Roman lead water pipes harmed people's health in a neurotoxic way and this explains that . . . ' Such propositions connect the past reality construct with today's in which modern medical causal connections like 'lead harms organisms and damages nerves' exist. Statements such as 'Roman lead pipes damaged people's nervous systems and therefore had cultural repercussions' are hermeneutical events; they fit the archaeological evidence and documents of the past into *my* reality – in my reality that exhibits a yesterday, a today, and a tomorrow in a unified way, so that a medical causal connection of my present is also valid in my yesterday.

Let us use again the example of the resurrection. The reality construct of a second order (A) above could read completely differently.

> [Construct of reality B] Jesus of Nazareth died and was buried. Shortly thereafter Peter saw a living Jesus in a vision. Other cultures also know such appearances of deceased persons. Such visions are generated by the psyche of the visionary; there is nothing outside the psyche that corresponds to them. Peter's psyche was tormented by a guilt complex (threefold denial) and by the desire to reverse the collapse of the Jesus movement. Thus, his psyche generated a way out. It produced a visual experience. Peter did not take this vision as the appearance of a ghost but interpreted it by means of the traditional category of resurrection given in the Jewish religion. For him, the deceased Jesus therefore did not wander like a ghost, but was living.
>
> Once the visionary experience was communicated intersubjectively, under the influence of Peter's suggestive power it could be repeated in a group of several disciples, and even in a mass suggestion of around 500 followers of Jesus.
>
> Finally, regarded as alive again, Jesus was endowed with majestic titles. His new status was defined in the light of Old Testament texts (e.g., Psalm 110.1: 'Sit at my right hand'), and so forth.

4 The Relationship between Emic and Etic Constructs

Historians framing things the way construct B does might come up with the idea that their construct draws closer to the bygone ontic reality(!) than construct A, which in the first century was likewise accompanied by the hope of coming close to ontic reality. If these historians were correct, they

would have to name their construct not B but A', that is, better than A, closer to the ontic reality of the past than A, correcting A'. Is it closer to it? On the basis of the constructivist epistemological approach, the answer is clearly no. A legitimate instrument to verify what is 'closer' or 'farther' is not available to us. A judgement about the distance of a construct to ontic reality is *in principle* impossible and would be feasible only from the Archimedian standpoint. Thus, the second construct comes to stand *beside* the first one on the same level. Therefore, conversely, A is not capable of correcting B either.

Even if we increased the number of constructs this would not change the fact that on the ontological level they all stand side by side as equals. One could think, for example, of a synthesis of A and B:

> [Construct of reality C] The risen Christ manifested himself as a being external to the visionaries, revealing himself in the brains of Peter and other Jesus adherents in several visionary experiences, without there being any sense data outside these individual brains. Cameras would not have recorded anything during these moments.
>
> With these visions, the risen Christ reoriented the lives of the disciples (call to be missionaries), he healed guilt feelings (denial, flight) and dissolved bereavement.
>
> Even if Peter's power of suggestion might have generated the repetitions of the visionary experience in the brains of other Jesus adherents, this does not exclude that the external risen Christ used Peter's power of suggestion as an instrument of his own acting.

Even though this synthesis C tries to avoid the one-sidedness of the two other constructs, which were either purely emic (A) or etic (B), from a constructivist-epistemological point of view it does not have an advantage over the two others on the ontological level.

5 Historiography as an Integral Part of the Historian's Construction of Present Reality

In spite of this ontological equality, can we still raise the question about which of the three constructs is to be accepted as better, as true, if 'better' and 'true' are no longer to be defined in the sense of correspondence between ontic reality and the construct? (a) On the one hand, A is better undergirded by the available source material than B is; this holds for all constructs that were not designed against the grain of the sources. (b) On the other hand, B fits in with the thinking of large numbers of contemporary Westerners so that, for their taste, B could appear to be more acceptable. How should we decide? Can the latter argument be taken seriously? Or does the first

argument win? If we take seriously the normative criteria set out above for historiography,[10] the answer inevitably turns out in favour of A, C wins the silver medal, and B comes in third.

This, however, will not keep anyone from deciding differently. Obviously the normative power of these criteria is insufficient. The criteria of subjective truth[11] exclude that for all people only one of the three variants can be considered as 'true'. This is the unavoidable consequence of these criteria, which originated because of the loss of the Thomistic correspondence. Each person must decide for himself or herself how smoothly solution A or B or C fits into *one's own overall* design of reality (*coherence*). It then becomes clear that the historiographical construct, which claims to describe past reality, is closely linked with the construct of reality that each historian builds for his or her own *present* time.[12] Applied to the example of Jesus' resurrection, this means: whether people prefer the historiographical construct A, C, or B depends on whether they are ready to accept the existence of a powerfully acting God in their own *present*, a God capable of raising the dead. Our historiographical construction does not stand separated as a *second* building beside our construction of current reality, but rather both represent two sections of *one* edifice, the middle section of which houses the present day and the wings yesterday and tomorrow. We write history not only for its own sake, but inevitably for our own sake and for the sake of our present in order to understand our present and to position ourselves in it.

That history is embedded in the construct of present reality is not only quite obvious when – as a most simple example – historiography underpins the present-day dignity of an individual or a group by, for example, demonstrating genealogical connections. All impressive genealogical tables have always served this function; they aim at the present of a person under consideration. The table of ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, for instance, celebrates him as a direct descendant not only of Abraham but also of King David. Moreover, the relatedness to the present holds not only for scholarly historical work on the New Testament, which also church circles read with the intention of learning something for their present faith and the life of the present church. It also holds, for instance, for the study of the 'great European' Charlemagne, who has become a symbol of contemporary European integration, or of the glacier man 'Ötzi', who promises to resolve enigmas about our origin. What is always at stake is to say something about ourselves and our present world by means of history, thus to design a reality construct of us and our world. When saying something about our origin, or that of the world, or that of the church, we intend to learn something about our 'essence', or that of

[10] See section 1 above. In respect to the historical sources, coherence, comprehensiveness, and as few additions as possible matter.

[11] See chapter II, sections 2.3–2.4 and chapter VIII above.

[12] See chapter VII, section 1.6 above on the example of the resurrection.

the present world or church – in fact we construct this 'essence', guided by the flow of the diverse sources of evidence.

As we will see shortly (especially in paragraph c), even in our most honest efforts, we as humans are not capable of considering history entirely detached from ourselves, sterilely isolated for its own sake, as if it could be brought back. No, it is dead, past, blown away – for as long as we are embedded in the dimension of time.

Once again, it becomes evident how much historiography is not reconstruction but construction. As humans we are not capable of acting in any other way even with scrupulously controlled methods.

This sobering insight would hold even if the most rigorous methodological norms could be met, that is, even if all three of the following sources of evidence could be blocked. In scholarly *praxis,* however, they do spring forth, although from a *normative* view they ought not, or at least not as strongly as they do. It would be a fallacy to assume that in praxis scholarship decides about the plausibility of a historiographical design solely on the basis of data located on the cognitive level.

(a) Everyone knows from their own experience of the scholarly enterprise that *evidence from social confirmation (consensus)* plays a role also in academic disciplines that do historical work. Otherwise there would be no footnotes that exhaustingly list all publications that share the author's view, or use quotations written by authorities as proof, which manifests bad scientific style, but can be observed as praxis. The North American 'Jesus Seminar' headed up by Robert Funk considered ballots of its erudite participants about the authenticity of Jesus' sayings (which of Jesus' sayings go back to the historical Jesus and which do not?) to be a legitimate source of evidence. All of those involved, however, should have been conscious of what they were doing there: a research group working over a period of several years inevitably tends towards 'group thinking', which makes the results of voting appear all the more questionable the older the group gets.

To be sure, scholarship always needs peer review, which usually convinces authors to alter their scholarly products in some way or other, because they initially overlooked some aspects or overstated others. These authors are then convinced by new data. However, if they are convinced simply because the reviewing peers are authoritative figures, then from a normative point of view no alterations should be made. From a normative perspective, a scholar should progress to a result irrespectively of what others – such as heads of departments, doctoral advisers, and influential editors – might think about it. That somebody goes against a prevailing scholarly opinion falsifies nothing.

(b) Even *evidence from emotional experience* plays a role in the historiographical process. Often the hypothesis of an investigator appears plausible to a colleague more quickly if the two are friends. But if this

investigator has previously attacked the other in a critical review or belongs to an unappealing or a suspicious group (another school, another nation, a younger generation, another gender), the hypothesis loses plausibility unless other sources of evidence prove to be so strong that they are able to serve as a counter-remedy. How much emotion plays a role as a source of evidence in the process of writing history becomes especially clear when very recent history is written, be it the recent past of one's own people, of a person still living, or of only recently deceased personalities. That sort of 'coming to terms with recent past' does not happen without emotion, and such feelings subconsciously influence our judgement about what appears plausible to us as a picture of the past and what does not.

(c) *Evidence from experience* plays a role in historical scholarship inasmuch as the individual investigator – mostly more subconsciously than consciously – reads sources of the past within his or her own horizon of experience. For a scholar, a large part of the words used in the sources (not just 'love') is subconsciously connected with experiential values. Understanding – developing empathy for what is described in ancient sources – occurs in such a way that one's own horizons of experience resonate with particular terms of the sources. This also holds for scholars who read ancient religious texts – at least subconsciously – in the horizon of their own experience of faith or in the horizon of the absence of an experience of faith. As long as scholars are human beings, no method will prevent this. However, if another scholar B has an entirely different present-day experiential horizon (for example, lacking experiences of poverty, racism, raising children, homosexual or heterosexual love, etc.), he or she might read the historical documents differently and therefore not find colleague A's picture of the past convincing. In such a case, the scholars' own present-day experiences subconsciously function as a source of evidence.

Our historiography represents a wing of the *one* house of reality that we construct. If we look once again at the house as a whole and think in normative terms, for the middle section – the present time – which dominates the side wings, the conclusion remains the same as in chapter VIII: the pluralism that inevitably emerges from the loss of the Thomistic correspondence can be reasonably limited only by the three criteria expounded in chapter VIII. These three criteria are an instrument to separate the wheat from the chaff. Furthermore, in view of the weak, rejected criterion of de facto consensus (see chapter VIII above), we will not allow ourselves to be impressed by masses that cheer alleged 'truths'. The quantity of those in agreement ought not to prevent us from keeping our own heads. Nevertheless, with this, the power of the criteria is exhausted. By means of these instruments, we will, in principle, not eliminate pluralism as long as we live in historical existence.

6 Conclusion

The different systems of constructed reality, of which the one influenced by the New Testament proved to be an effective one for centuries, will thus enter into a competition. However, before we compete against each other in the valley of everyday life, we should climb the mountain of epistemology together in order to remember that *all* of the propositions of our systems, from an epistemological point of view, possess the same ontological quality (the quality of what is merely hoped for and believed in reference to ontic reality because any Thomistic correspondence cannot be *known* by human beings). Epistemology drives us towards looking at each other at eye level, towards modesty about oneself, which provides a basis for tolerant behaviour without condescension.

The experience of climbing the epistemological mountain in no way excludes, but rather includes that the competitors in the valley undauntedly stand up for their own respective designs of reality. On *this* level then they will (naively) use the *ens intellectui concordat*[13] and the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*[14] as the basis for their own lives, because no one can live by epistemology alone. Anyone who does not climb down from the epistemological mountain back into the valley where the fields are will starve. Such a candid advocacy of one's own construct of reality in the valley – I myself am willing to stand up for what is shaped by the New Testament – can even create an environment favourable to tolerant dealings with those who construct differently, as inter-religious dialogue often shows. Paradoxically, those who live in badly constructed shacks in the valley, lacking a consolidated identity and not really knowing what they should stand for, often tend to develop intolerant behaviour.[15]

Every now and again it does us good to climb the mountain in order to have a time of truce together and to assure ourselves of the (also) epistemological foundation of tolerant behaviour in a world threatened with being torn apart by disparate worldviews and religious pluralism.

[13] 'Being is in accord with the cognitive faculty.'

[14] 'Correspondence of the thing and the cognitive faculty.'

[15] See further C. Schwöbel, 'Toleranz aus Glauben: Identität und Toleranz im Horizont religiöser Wahrheitsgewissheiten', in C. Schwöbel and D. v. Tippelskirch (eds), *Die religiösen Wurzeln der Toleranz* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2002), 11–37, esp. 31–32.

Appendix

Life after Death in Selected Texts of Ancient Judaism

1 General Resurrection of the Dead

In the decade of the 160s BCE the apocalypticist Daniel formulated as a vision of the future: at the end of the ages the righteous people will 'be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting ignominy.' Dan. 12.1-2 presents the first *certain*[1] reference in Israel for the belief in a resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Only Israel will be raised, not all peoples. With respect to anthropology, Daniel 12 appears to presuppose a psychosomatic unity of the human being, which with death is reduced to a shadow ('sleep'), in order to return to a complete corporeality with the resurrection. On the horizon the sails of the Hellenistic body–soul dichotomy do not come into view yet. On the contrary, the apocalypticist Daniel was caught up in fervent anti-Hellenism.

Why did the concept of resurrection sprout so late in Israel? In the decade of the 160s BCE, Israel was confronted with the most difficult crisis of identity in its history up until then. The rites of the Jewish religion were prohibited, and the country was supposed to be Hellenized by force. Hellenistic Seleucid occupying forces from Syria reigned in Palestine with an iron hand, and Jewish aristocrats, men from Israel's own people, were eager to organize the country according to Hellenistic patterns, to convert Jerusalem into a polis 'Antioch'. They said to each other: 'Let us make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for we have had to suffer much since we isolated ourselves from the pagans' (1 Macc. 1.11; cf. Dan. 11.30b, 32a). They planned to tear down the troublesome barriers erected by Israelite religion towards the international Hellenistic society. An edict in the summer of 167 BCE placed circumcision and possession of the Torah under the death penalty. The Sabbath and Jewish feasts were no longer in force. In the temple, the three sacrifices were abolished, and in December 167 BCE the altar of burnt

[1] The interpretation of older possible references, Isa. 26.19; Ezek. 37.1-14; Hos. 6.1-3 et al., is disputed. In Hosea 6 and Isaiah 26 Canaanite belief, based on the cycles of vegetation, reverberates. Scholarship has moved away from the older hypothesis of Persian roots of the Jewish belief in resurrection. Cf., e.g., P. Hoffmann, 'Auferstehung I/2', *TRE* 4 (1979), 444.

offerings was fitted with a pagan top, with a 'monster of desolation' (Dan. 8.13 and often elsewhere), dedicated to Baal Shamem, alias Zeus Olympios. In Judea, pagan shrines were erected. Anyone who refused to accept their cult risked imprisonment and execution, 'the den of lions' and the 'fiery furnace'.

Although the author of Daniel looked back to past times of the Israelite Diaspora, his images of history (den of lions, fiery furnace, etc.) served as dramatic symbols of *his own time* in the decade of the 160s BCE – just as during the George W. Bush era, George Clooney, with his movie *Good Night and Good Luck*, revived the McCarthy era characterized by hysterical patriotism. The viewers in 2006 had to discover for themselves the striking parallels between the two eras. The East European *samisdat* [clandestine] literature before the fall of the iron curtain, to name another example, lived off the same dynamic.[2]

The apocalypticist Daniel perceived his present time as the distressing culmination point of history.[3] Judaism was in danger of perishing because of violently enforced assimilation to Hellenistic culture. Where was God? The question of theodicy beset the souls. Any who held on to Yahweh saw themselves exposed to deadly pressure, while those who fell away from the Torah of Yahweh and ran into the arms of Hellenism celebrated. Had God given up the claim to be a just God? Did God abandon the faithful and reward those who had turned away?

Anyone who did not want to give up in the face of the problem of theodicy searched for new solutions. Apocalypticists resolved the problem eschatologically. Since in the present time righteous persons are not rewarded and evildoers are not punished, God will exercise justice in a final judgement at the end of history. However, such a final judgement must be able to apply also to those who have died. Only if those who died as apostates after having lived the high life are raised from the dead can they be brought to account. And those who went to their grave as hard-pressed faithful to Yahweh, even as martyrs, can be rewarded only if they are restored to life.[4] The experience

[2] On the symbolic character of the Daniel narratives see further P. Lampe, 'Die Apokalyptiker – ihre Situation und ihr Handeln', in U. Luz, J. Kegler, P. Lampe, and P. Hoffmann, *Eschatologie und Friedenshandeln* (2nd edn; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982), 59–114. In Israel, not until three years later did the 'monster of desolation' fall, when, with the help of the insurgent Maccabaeans, the temple was consecrated anew in December 164 BCE. Israel remembers this event at the celebration of Hanukah.

[3] Daniel 9.12; 7.7-8, 19-20, 23-24; 8.23; 11.24. In Daniel 2, the materials of the statue, which represents world history, increasingly decline, from gold in the head to clay in the feet, and in Daniel 7 the monsters representing the kingdoms of world history become increasingly more dangerous. The Hellenistic empire is depicted as 'different' from all previous empires, and the contemporary Seleucid king is once again portrayed as 'different' from his Seleucid predecessors, that is, as a last negative escalation.

[4] A century later (c. 100–50 BCE), this hope also inspired texts like 2 Maccabees 7 and 14.37-46. Limbs and organs of the martyrs, which they sacrifice for God in the present, will be given back to them in a divine act of creating anew, which is comparable to the creation in

that at the time of a person's death many 'accounts were left open' so that it was possible to doubt God's justice called for a solution in which the irrevocable aspect of death, the finality of open accounts, was cancelled (resurrection) and justice was established after all (God's final judgement), so that it was possible to speak again about a just God (theodicy). This was a cognitive construction in the framework of which the hope of resurrection was subordinated to the idea of final judgement – subordinated as a maidservant, as a necessary condition. In this framework, resurrection meant that persons could be held accountable for their culpable or righteous actions even after their death.

As in the earliest strata of the early Christian tradition about the resurrection of Jesus,[5] the *theological* aspect was thus placed at the very front. The primary purpose of the resurrection concept was not anthropological but to make a statement about God, about God's faithfulness, God's own justice and righteousness – and not primarily about human beings' righteousness or sinfulness that are exposed in the final judgement. To speak of resurrection was first and foremost to speak about God, only secondarily about human beings.

The concept of a *general* resurrection of all Israelites blossomed in Judaism in the time after the Book of Daniel and was popularized especially by the Pharisees.[6] The first Christians drew on this concept when they needed a category of perception for what they 'saw' (ὤφθη) on Easter morning. But with their interpretation of the Easter visions they made a bold leap from the general to the individual. An individual, Jesus from Nazareth, had been raised. Where were the others? The early Christians concluded that these would follow as soon as possible, that Jesus was only the first of the others.[7]

a mother's womb. That is, this creating act does not presuppose a material continuity to the tortured pre-mortal body. The author of 2 Maccabees appears to think that only the martyrs and the righteous in Israel will be raised (7.14).

5 See chapter VII, section 1 above.

6 Cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.163; further *Antiquities* 18.14 as well as later the Second Benediction in the *Eighteen Benedictions*. To which extent the Qumran community adhered to this conception is not clear. As possible references at least 1Q 4.7-8, 12-14 come into consideration, as well as the Qumran graves that are south–north oriented in the direction of paradise. By contrast, 1QH 6.29-30, 34; 7.31; 11.12-14 only speak about being saved from deadly danger. Hippolytus (*Haer*. 9.27) maintains a doctrine of bodily resurrection for the Essenes. This, however, contradicts Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.153ff.: immortality of the soul); his picture of the Essenes perhaps attempted to accommodate the taste of his Hellenistic readers. For resurrection in the apocalyptic Enoch tradition, see esp. *1 Enoch* 20.8; 90.33, 38; 91.10-11; 92.3-5; perhaps also chapter 22. We leave out of consideration the Jewish apocalyptic literature that did not originate until after 70 CE: the Book of Parables in *1 Enoch* 37–71 (51.1-5 and throughout), whose pre-70 date is not totally certain, *4 Ezra* (7.26-44), *2 Baruch* (21.23-24; 30.1-5; 42.7; 50.2-4), Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (3.10) et al. They also taught resurrection – perhaps being influenced by Christianity – and sometimes (for instance in *4 Ezra* 7.88-89) amalgamated it with the Hellenistic anthropological dichotomy.

7 1 Corinthians 15.20-23: Christ is only the 'first of those who have fallen asleep' and will be raised. 'In Christ all will be made alive.' 'Christ is the first, then all who belong to him' will follow.

2 The Taking up of Righteous Individuals

Had the leap from the general to the individual already been taken in Judaism itself, so that the interpretation of the first Christians was not such a bold exception? Instead of piling up additional passages that moved along the line indicated by the Book of Daniel, let us turn to the concept of *taking up individuals*. That an individual *without dying* is forever taken away from earthly life up to God (Elijah, Enoch) is admittedly in no way identical with the concept of resurrection of a deceased person. But in one rare case such taking up was also asserted about someone *who had died* (Moses), without the resurrection terminology being used. In this way a conception emerged that was somewhat related to Christology; it might have co-influenced the cognitive construction of the early Christians.

2.1

The prophet Elijah did not die but was taken up by a chariot of fire into heaven.[8] There he awaits his second coming. Shortly before the final judgement he will appear again on earth as God's herald, in order to set people straight and thus diminish God's wrath.[9]

Groups who imagined that the final judgement of God was near were consequently on the lookout for the returning Elijah. Who might he be? Had Elijah returned in John, the Baptizer at the Jordan, to prepare God's way (Mk 9.13; Mt. 11.10, 14; 17.12-13)? During his Galilean activity, outsiders allegedly also identified Jesus of Nazareth with the returned Elijah (Mk 6.15; 8.28).

Alongside Elijah, the forefather Enoch had been taken up to God without succumbing to death (Gen. 5.24; *1 Enoch* 81.6). According to the Jewish Palestinian *Book of Jubilees* (mid-second-century BCE), Enoch was taken up from humankind into the Garden of Eden and received in honour. There he records the offences of all human generations for the last judgement (*Jub*. 4.23-24). In a Jewish apocalyptic text from the first century CE (*1 Enoch* 70-71),

8 Second Kings 2.11, 13; Sir. 48.9, 12. Similarly Ezra: In the Jewish apocalyptic writing of *4 Ezra* (14.9), admittedly not composed until around 100 CE, Ezra is taken up away from human beings into the divine sphere where he lives until the end of the world. This motif is not to be confused with the visionary-ecstatic journeys to heaven that are documented often in both pagan and Jewish writings – heavenly journeys such as the one that Isaiah experienced. In an ecstatic vision Isaiah is taken through the seven heavens above the firmament. Afterwards, he returns in his body and relates this experience to other prophets (*The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, 7–9, from the second century CE). Furthermore, *3 Baruch* (between 70 and 231 CE) depicts Baruch's trip across the heavens at the end of which he returns to his existence on earth. Paul also points to such an ecstatic heavenly journey in his life (2 Cor. 12.2-4), without making much of a fuss about it.

9 Already Malachi (3.1, 23-24) developed 2 Kgs 2.11 further in this way. Cf. afterwards also Sir. 48.10; Mk 9.11 (see vv. 4-5); Mt. 17.10–11 and Revelation 11 (one of the two witnesses is most likely to be identified with Elijah who returned).

after having been taken up into heaven (70.1-3a), the following is promised to Enoch in heaven: 'And all shall walk in your way since righteousness never forsakes you for ever and ever; with you will be their dwelling places . . . they shall not be separated from you for ever and ever' (71.16). Enoch is stylized as the prototype of a righteous person. His bookkeeping will play a decisive role in the final judgement. All righteous people will be drawn to him.

Here we discover linguistic material that is parallel to the early Christian Christological development (Christ acts as judge in the final judgement; he draws his own people to him; he makes sure that dwelling places in heaven are prepared for them, etc.). Nevertheless, is there also documentary evidence for the taking up of someone who *has died*? From the Hellenistic-Roman sphere, examples such as Heracles, his mother Alkmene, or the apotheoses of deceased emperors come to mind.[10] But in order to capture the mental world of Galilean fishermen, there is no need to wander that far. We discover such a document in Judaism as well.

2.2

Moses died and was buried, as Deut. 34.6 and the *Ascension of Moses* (10.12 and throughout) record. His burial place, however, remained unknown according to the mysterious note at the conclusion of Deuteronomy (34.6; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.326). In later tradition, an ascension of the deceased Moses was inferred from this note.

The *Ascension of Moses* (*Assumptio Mosis*) was composed in Jewish apocalyptic circles (of Judea) not long after the year 6 CE, in the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.[11] In this text, Moses records his last will in the form of

[10] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 4.38.5 (ὑπέλαβον τὸν Ἡρακλέα τοῖς χρησμοῖς ἀκολούθως ἐξ ἀνθρώπων εἰς θεοὺς μεθεστάσθαι). Further references easily accessible, e.g., in G. Strecker, 'Entrückung', *RAC* 5 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1962), 461–76; L. Koep, 'Consecratio II', *RAC* 3 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1957), 284–94; E. Bickermann, 'Die römische Kaiserapotheose', *ANRW* 27 (1929), 1–34; F. Pfister, 'Die Reliquien als Kultobjekt: Geschichte des Reliquienkultes, II', *RGVV* 5 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1974), 480–89; G. Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den Himmelfahrts- und Erhöhungstexten bei Lukas* (Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 26; München: Kösel, 1971); I. Kezbere, *Umstrittener Monotheismus: Wahre und falsche Apotheose im lukanischen Doppelwerk* (NTOA 60; Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht/Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007). Also those who critically distanced themselves from this conception (Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 3.3; Plutarch, *Romulus* 28; Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* 35–42) or resorted to it apologetically (Justin, *Apol.* 1.21), documented its popularity. The conception implies the idea that no earthly remains of the one who was taken up can be found; a grave, if it exists, is empty: Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 4.38.5 (μηδὲν ὅλως ὀστοῦν εὑρόντες); Herodotos, *Hist.* 7.166-67; Pausanias 2.32.1; Diogenes Laertius 8.69; Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.27.3.

[11] In chapter 6, the author looks back to the year 4 BCE (the death of Herod the Great and Varus' suppression of Jewish rebels); 6.7 probably refers back to the banishment of Herod's son Archelaus to Gaul in the year 6/7 CE. According to 7.1, these events took place not long ago. That the author wrote before 30 CE is evident from 6.7: the prophecy of this passage that the sons of Herod would rule for a shorter period than their father – less than thirty-four

a prophetic speech. At the conclusion of the writing he dies. The devil and the archangel Michael quarrel with each other over his body. Good wins out: Moses is taken up into heaven.[12] In this way he meets a fate similar to Elijah's, and it is not surprising that Jewish circles of the first century CE also expected a return of Moses – together with Elijah for a second coming at the end of time.[13]

Dead and taken up to God like Jesus, the apocalyptic figure of Moses of the early first century CE exhibits even more parallels to Christology. Superhuman traits also characterize the Moses taken up to God. Moses is 'the holy, manifold and incomprehensible spirit, worthy of the Lord; he is the lord of the word, faithful in all things; the divine prophet . . . the perfect teacher in the world . . . the great angel' (*Assumption of Moses* 11.16-17).

Furthermore, being taken up into heaven Moses acts as Israel's advocate before God. Joshua asks Moses shortly before his departure: 'Lord, you are departing, and who will care for this people? . . . Who will pray for them, not omitting a single day, so that I may lead them into the land of (their) forefathers? . . . What shall then become of this people, my lord Moses?' (11.10-11, 19). Moses answers: God 'has appointed me for their sake and for the sake of their sins in order that (I pray and plead) for them' (12.6; cf. with respect to Christ, e.g., 1 Jn 2.1; Rom. 8.34).

To highlight the similarities with Christology even more, Moses' fate of being taken up and exalted *corresponds* to the eschatological destiny of his people because, in God's final salvation, Israel will triumph over its enemies and will be lifted up to heaven and exalted just like Moses. Then 'you, O Israel, will be happy . . . God will exalt you, and will give you a firm place in the heaven of the stars . . . you will look down from on high and see your enemies on earth, and you will recognize them and rejoice' (10.8-10; cf. with respect to the Christians, e.g., 1 Thess. 4.17; 1 Cor. 15.20ff.; further 6.2; Lk. 22.30; Rev. 1.6; 5.10). Moses is the first among his people – analogous to Christ and his followers.

years – turned out to be false in the year 30 CE. Herod's sons Philip and Antipas ruled in their territories for thirty-seven and forty-three years respectively.

12 The conclusion of the only manuscript of the *Ascension of Moses* is destroyed. Nevertheless, its ending, including the taking up of Moses (ἀνάληψις Μωυσέως), was saved by Gelasius in his records of the Council of Nicaea; Gelasius at the same time quoted the first chapter of the writing, especially 1.14. In addition, the conclusion is referred to within the writing itself (11.8; cf. 10.12; 11.5-7). On Gelasius, see E. Brandenburger, *Himmelfahrt Moses* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit, 5,2: Apokalypsen; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 61; A. M. Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca* (Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graeca 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 37–63.

13 Mark 9.4-5 and Rev. 11.3-13 (Moses and Elijah as the two witnesses) presuppose this expectation.

It is hardly a surprise that early Christians in the course of the development of their context reflected on the parallelism Moses/Jesus. In the first chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, reminiscences of the story of Moses are discernible,[14] which suggest to the reader to consider Jesus as a new, second Moses who, above all in the Sermon on the Mount, interpreted the Mosaic Torah in a new and definitive way.

3 Summary of Jewish Elements of Knowledge from the Time of Early Christianity

(a) A general resurrection of the deceased Israelites is expected (element of knowledge no. 4; see chapter VII, section 1.2 above).

(b) In rare cases outstanding righteous individuals, prophets, or revelators of God's will, can escape the talons of death and be taken up to God *before* the final judgement and the general resurrection of the dead (Elijah, Enoch). In the event that they die earlier, they can be granted new life from death (Moses). Moses' being caught up to heaven is not described as 'resurrection'. 'Resurrection' terminology is missing. Still this second element of knowledge was capable of facilitating the early Christians' interpretation of the Easter visions. In chapter VII, section 1.2, we could have added this element to the list as unit of knowledge no. 5,[15] if its elaboration had not taken up too much space there.

In addition, other Jewish units of knowledge were capable of inspiring the further development of the early Christological context:

(c) Those taken up to heaven can take up a position of honour or majesty with sometimes superhuman characteristics (Enoch, Moses, and those taken up by apotheosis in Hellenistic-Roman culture; likewise Jesus Christ).

[14] Egypt motif (Mt. 2.13ff., 19ff.); the elected child that is endangered by an evil king is saved (Mt. 2.13-23; 2.13 picks up Exod. 2.15); Mt. 2.19 picks up Exod. 4.19; innocent children die (Mt. 2.16-17; cf. Exod. 11.5); the motifs of the desert and the number forty (Mt. 4.1-2). The Moses/Jesus parallelism interested above all the authors of the pre-Matthean layers of the first chapters. Matthew himself shows less interest in this theme.

[15] The two linguistic fields ('taking up', 'resurrection/raising') overlapped relatively soon in the early Christian tradition. In about 50/51 CE, Paul holds that the *taking up* of the Christians who are still alive at the parousia is analogous to the *resurrection* of Jesus (1 Thess. 4.14). Similarly, he presents their being *taken up* as something equivalent to the *resurrection* of deceased Christians (4.16-17). The linguistic fields also overlap two decades later in Mark 16. Mark 16.5-6 connects resurrection terminology with the typical *motif that the body of a person taken up and exalted cannot be found anymore* (Moses: *Ascension of Moses* 11.6, 8; Deut. 34.6b; Enoch and Elijah who did not die; but also, e.g., Heracles and Alkmene, see note 10 above). If Mark 9 originally was a resurrection story (cf. 9.9), the motif of being taken up, represented by the radiant bodies of Elijah and Moses and a transfigured Jesus, would have been connected with the motif of resurrection.

(d) At the end of time those taken up can appear on earth a *second time* (Elijah, Moses; Christ's parousia).[16]

(e) Those taken up perform functions that are related to God's *judgement*. Before the final judgement, Elijah appears on earth to urge Israel to repent, so that the wrath of the judge, God, can be placated. Enoch records the offences of the human beings for the final judgement. Moses plays the role of advocate for Israel – as does Christ for those who belong to him. In addition, the early Christians promote Christ himself to judge of the world by bestowing the Jewish title of *Son of Man* to him.

The root of the Jewish idea that the 'Son of Man' acts as eschatological judge of the world lies in the encoding images of the vision in Daniel 7. At the final judgement *beasts* (= evil kingdoms of the world) are convicted, but a *human* person, one like a son of man (= the Israel that is obedient to God; 7.13, 18), is brought before God, the judge, 'with the clouds of heaven', in order to be rewarded with power and eternal sovereignty over the nations. The opposition of the images 'son of man' versus 'beasts' expresses the qualitative gap between Israel and the nations.

Later Jewish recipients of the text disregarded its allegorical character and began to interpret the 'son of man' no longer collectively as Israel but paradoxically as a *super*human, heavenly, and pre-existent individual (e.g., *1 Enoch* 48.6, 3) who judges the world at the eschaton (e.g. Mk 8.38; Lk. 12.8-9). According to the Book of Parables in *1 Enoch* 37-71,[17] which in its final version was composed in the first century CE, presumably even after the Jewish catastrophe of the year 70 CE, but made use of older traditions, the Son of Man as eschatological judge will 'tear the mighty from their daybeds and the strong from their thrones; he will loosen the reins of the strong and smash the teeth of the sinners' (46.4). Individual characteristics of this eschatological figure are again reminiscent of early Christian Christology: The Son of Man gives revelation and is righteous (*1 Enoch* 46.3). He kindly supports the righteous; he is the light for the nations and the hope of the distressed (46.1; 48.4). At the final judgement, he sits on a throne, receives the obeisance of the powerful, who have become petitioners, and obliterates the ungodly together with evil 'from the face of the earth' (62.5, 2-3, 8-9; 63.11; 69.27-29). He saves the righteous and holds an eschatological joyful

[16] An interesting variant is documented in the nineties of the first century CE. In Revelation 11, Moses and Elijah (as the most probable identifications of the two witnesses in chapter 11), after their second appearance at the end time as prophets of repentance, ascend to heaven on a cloud for a second time (11.12). Before this second ascension, however, they are assassinated like many of Israel's prophets (Rev. 11.7 picks up the tradition of murdered prophets in Israel: 1 Kgs 19.10; 1 Thess. 2.15; Mt. 23.29ff.; Acts 7.35, 51-53 et al.). Their corpses remain unburied on the street (Rev. 11.7-10) until God calls them back to life (11.11) and takes them up. For Moses this was his second death; for Elijah his first.

[17] For this book, see recently, e.g., G. Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

feast together with them, bestowing eternity upon them (62.13-14; 71.17). Early Christian architects of Christology identified this Jewish apocalyptic figure of salvation with Jesus of Nazareth (Mt. 25.31-32 et al.), although the historical Jesus himself had spoken of the 'Son of Man' as judge of the world only in the *third* person (Mk 8.38; Lk. 12.8-9).[18]

(f) The destiny of the righteous people *corresponds* to the fate of the one who is taken up. Israel will be elevated to heaven like Moses; those who are righteous walk on the path of Enoch and will find their eschatological dwelling places with him. Christ's followers will be raised and exalted like him.

The difference between Moses and Jesus consisted in the fact that Jesus' work in Galilee did not belong to a distant past (thus Moses, Elijah, and Enoch), but that he had lived together with the earliest constructors of the Christian context. Together with him they had eaten and washed the dust from their feet just a few days earlier before he died. This difference shows the unprecedented audacity of the early Christian constructors of reality. It sets them apart from those who talked about a taken-up Moses or Elijah.

[18] That also Enoch, as one can occasionally read in secondary literature, was identified with the heavenly 'Son of Man' is due to a misunderstanding of *1 Enoch* 71.14. The term 'male person' in 71.14 is never used for the majestic title 'Son of Man'.

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Titles in **bold** are constructivistically oriented or deal with constructivism.

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Index of References

The index comprises ancient pagan and Jewish, biblical, patristic and medieval references.

Index of Subjects

'A fascinating approach to the New Testament.'

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'Convincing, profound, innovative and in its interdisciplinary character courageous. The study casts new light on the New Testament as a foundation document of the Christian concept of reality.'

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Lampe argues that in talking about 'reality' theologians must take further steps to engage with the concept of 'reality' as it is discussed in the fields of philosophical epistemology, sociology of knowledge and brain research. However, as Lampe shows, theology has so far hardly or only reluctantly participated in this dialogue.

Peter Lampe holds a chair in New Testament Theology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.



